

VICTIM AND NON-VICTIM PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF CYBER-HARASSING AND CYBERSTALKING BEHAVIOURS

CATHERINE O'NEILL

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of Nottingham Trent University for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January 2011

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES	6
LIST OF FIGURES	8
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	10
DECLARATION	11
ABSTRACT	12
CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW.....	14
1.1 <i>Overview of the Thesis</i>	14
1.2 <i>Aims and Objectives</i>	16
1.3 <i>Research Questions</i>	17
1.4 <i>Outline of Chapters</i>	17
CHAPTER 2: A PSYCHOSOCIAL OVERVIEW OF STALKING AND CYBERSTALKING	20
2.1 <i>Introduction</i>	20
2.2 <i>Stalking: Legal and definitional issues</i>	21
2.2.1 <i>The Evolution of Anti-Harassment Legislation</i>	22
2.2.2.1 <i>The Test of Reasonableness</i>	24
2.2.2.2 <i>The Victim-Defined Crime</i>	27
2.2.2.3 <i>The Application of the Protection from Harassment Act</i>	32
2.2.3 <i>The Nature and Extent of Stalking</i>	35
2.2.4 <i>Perpetrator and Victim Characteristics</i>	41
2.3 <i>Cyber-harassment and Cyberstalking: Legal and Definitional Issues</i>	52
2.3.1 <i>The Nature and Extent of Cyberstalking</i>	56
2.3.2 <i>Perpetrator and Victim Characteristics</i>	61
2.3.3 <i>Anonymity as an Incentive to Engage in Cyber-Harassment</i>	65
2.3.4 <i>Perceptions of Cyberstalking</i>	68
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS	70
3.1 <i>Introduction</i>	70
3.2.1 <i>Methodological Debates and Paradigm Wars</i>	70
3.2.2 <i>Quantitative Approaches</i>	71
3.2.3 <i>Qualitative Approaches</i>	73
3.2.4 <i>Mixed Methods Approaches</i>	75
3.2.5 <i>Rationale for Mixed Methods Approach</i>	77
3.3 <i>Advantages and Disadvantages of Internet-Mediated Research</i>	78
3.3.1 <i>Costs</i>	78
3.3.2 <i>Incentives</i>	79
3.3.3 <i>Sampling</i>	80
3.3.4 <i>Data Quality</i>	82
3.3.4.1 <i>Practical Issues</i>	83
3.3.4.2 <i>Multiple Submissions</i>	84
3.3.4.3 <i>Attrition and Missing Data</i>	85

3.3.4.4 The Equivalence of Online to Offline Measures	85
3.3.4.5 Self-disclosure and Reduced Socially Desirable Responding	87
3.4 Online Interviewing	88
3.4.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Conducting Online Interviews	89
3.4.2 Instant Messenger as tool for online interviewing	91
3.5 Ethical Considerations	93
3.5.1 Informed Consent	93
3.5.2 Risk of Harm	93
3.5.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality	94
3.5.4 Debriefing	95
3.5.5 Right to Withdraw	95
CHAPTER 4: PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF CYBER-HARASSING BEHAVIOURS	96
4.1 Introduction	96
4.1.1 The Role of Personality	99
4.1.1.1 The ‘Big Five’	100
4.1.1.2 Internet self-efficacy	102
4.2 Method	103
4.2.1 Participants	103
4.2.2 Measures	103
4.2.3 Procedure	106
4.2.4 Data Screening	106
4.3 Results	108
4.3.1 Perceived Criminality of Cyber-Harassing Behaviours	108
4.3.1.1 Descriptive Statistics	108
4.3.1.2 Dimensions of perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours	109
4.3.1.3 The role of personality in the perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours	114
4.3.2 Experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours	115
4.3.2.1 Descriptive Statistics	115
4.3.2.2 Gender differences in experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours	116
4.3.2.3 The role of personality predicting the experience cyber-harassing behaviours	117
4.3.2.4 The relationship between personality, Internet self-efficacy, experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours and upset	119
4.3.2.4.1 Gender differences in ratings of upset	119
4.3.3 Perceived peer support in the experience of cyber-harassing behaviours	120
4.3.3.1 Multiple Response Analyses	120
4.3.3.2 Gender differences in perceived social support for the experience of cyber-harassing behaviours	121
4.4 Discussion	125
4.4.1 Perceived criminality of cyber-harassment	125
4.4.2 Experiencing cyber-harassment	127
4.4.3 Perceived social support in dealing with cyber-harassment	130
4.4.4 Implications	131
4.4.5 Limitations	131

4.4.6 Future Research	132
CHAPTER 5: VICTIMS' ACCOUNTS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES OF CYBER-HARASSMENT	134
5.1 Introduction	134
5.2 Method	139
5.2.1 Participants	139
5.2.2 Measures	140
5.2.3 Procedure	140
5.2.4 Analysis	142
5.3 Results.....	143
5.3.1 Superordinate Theme 1: It's all virtual, nothing is face to face confrontational.....	144
5.3.1.2 The Fantasy Realm	144
5.3.1.3 The Mentally Ill Perpetrator: "Psychos and Nutjobs"	145
5.3.1.4 "It was something silly"	147
5.3.1.5 Embodiment of Threat	149
5.3.1.6 "I'm not sure"	150
5.3.2 Superordinate Theme 2: PTSD-Like Symptoms	151
5.3.2.1 Re-experiencing the event	152
5.3.2.2 Avoidance and Emotional Numbing.....	153
5.4 Discussion.....	156
5.4.1 Implications	161
5.4.2 Limitations	161
5.4.3 Future Research	163
CHAPTER 6: NON-VICTIMS' PERCEPTIONS OF CYBER-HARASSMENT	165
6.1 Introduction	165
6.1.2 Rationale	168
6.1.3 Research Aims and Objectives.....	168
6.2 Method	169
6.2.1 Participants	169
6.2.2 Measures	169
6.2.3 Procedure	170
6.2.4 Analysis	171
6.3 Results.....	172
6.3.1 Theme 1: Anonymity	172
6.3.2 Theme 2: Social Support.....	179
6.3.3 Theme 3: Victim Blame	183
6.4 Discussion.....	188
6.4.1 Anonymity	188
6.4.2 Social Support	189
6.4.3 Victim Blame.....	190
6.4.4 Implications	192
6.4.5 Limitations.....	193
6.4.6 Future Research	193

CHAPTER 7: POLICE OFFICERS' PERCEPTIONS AND ROLE IN COMBATING CYBER-HARASSMENT	195
7.1 <i>Introduction</i>	195
7.1.1 Rationale	199
7.1.2 Research Aims and Objectives.....	199
7.2 <i>Method</i>	199
7.2.1 Participants	199
7.2.2 Measures	200
7.2.3 Procedure	201
7.2.4 Analysis	201
7.3 <i>Results</i>	202
7.3.1 Theme 1: Accessibility.....	202
7.3.2 Theme 2: Threat.....	209
7.3.3 Theme 3: The Unhelpful Victim	214
7.4 <i>Discussion</i>	218
7.4.1 Perceptions of Cyber-harassment and Victims.....	218
7.4.2 Police Officers' Role in Combating Cyber-Harassment	222
7.4.3 Limitations	224
7.4.4 Future Research	225
7.4.5 Implications	226
CHAPTER 8: GENERAL DISCUSSION	229
8.1 <i>Perceived Criminality of Cyber-Harassment</i>	229
8.2 <i>The Experience of Cyber-Harassment</i>	232
8.3 <i>Cyber-Harassed Victims and Support</i>	239
8.4 <i>Implications</i>	241
8.5 <i>Future Research</i>	243
8.6 <i>Summary</i>	244
REFERENCES	246
APPENDIX 1: RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR ONLINE SURVEY (STUDY 1)	267
APPENDIX 2: PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF ONLINE BEHAVIOURS: BACKGROUND INFORMATION, INFORMED CONSENT AND SURVEY (STUDY 1)	268
APPENDIX 3: RECRUITMENT EMAILS FOR ONLINE INTERVIEWS WITH CYBER-HARASSED VICTIMS (STUDY 2)	287
APPENDIX 4: EXPERIENCES OF NEGATIVE ONLINE BEHAVIOURS: BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT (STUDY 2)	288
APPENDIX 5: EXPERIENCES OF NEGATIVE ONLINE BEHAVIOURS: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (STUDY 2).....	292
APPENDIX 6: RECRUITMENT EMAILS FOR PERCEPTIONS OF CYBER-HARASSMENT INTERVIEWS	294
APPENDIX 7: PERCEPTIONS OF CYBER-HARASSMENT INTERVIEWS: BACKGROUND INFORMATION, AND DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT (STUDY 3)	295
APPENDIX 8: PERCEPTIONS OF CYBER-HARASSMENT: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (STUDY 3)	298
APPENDIX 9: INTERVIEWS WITH POLICE OFFICERS: RECRUITMENT LETTER (STUDY 4).....	299
APPENDIX 10: POLICE OFFICERS: BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION SHEET (STUDY 4)	300
APPENDIX 11: INTERVIEWS WITH POLICE OFFICERS: DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT (STUDY 4)	302
APPENDIX 12: INTERVIEWS WITH POLICE OFFICERS: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET (STUDY 4)	303
APPENDIX 13: INTERVIEWS WITH POLICE OFFICERS: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (STUDY 4)	304

List of Tables

Table 1: Summary of Research evaluating the Impact of Stalking on Victims	27
Table 2: The Prevalence of Stalking	35
Table 3: Stalking Behaviours	39
Table 4: Characteristics of Perpetrators and Victims of Harassment	45
Table 5: Demographics of Perpetrators of Harassment	50
Table 6: Demographics of Victims of Harassment	51
Table 7: The Prevalence of Cyber-Harassment	56
Table 8: Characteristics of Perpetrators and Victims of Cyberstalking	63
Table 9: Justification for deleting data sets	107
Table 10: Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions of Criminality of Cyber-harassing Behaviours	108
Table 11: Pattern Matrix showing the Loadings of Items on each of the Factors	111
Table 12: Correlation coefficients between variables included in the factor analysis	112
Table 13: Matrix Showing the Correlations between Each of the Factors	113
Table 14: Multiple Regressions using Internet self-efficacy and the ‘Big Five’ personality dimensions as predictors for <i>Deception/Disclosure, Malicious Software, and Harassing Messages</i>	114
Table 15: Descriptive statistics showing the percentages of those who reported experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours	115
Table 16: Gender breakdown relating to experiencing online behaviours	116
Table 17: Logistic Regression Analyses	118
Table 18: Percentages of who participants would tell if they experienced cyber-harassing behaviours	122
Table 19: Gender differences in who participants thought they would tell if they experienced cyber-harassing behaviours.....	123
Table 20: Participants’ Demographic Information for Study 2	139
Table 21: Process used for analysis of data	142
Table 22: Superordinate and subordinate themes of IPA analysis.....	144
Table 23: Participants' Demographic Information for Study 3	169
Table 24: Analytical process used for thematic analysis	171
Table 25: Participants' Demographic Information for Study 4	200

Table 26: Themes identified in the qualitative research of this thesis236

List of Figures

Figure 1: Scree Plot indicating the number of factors found for the behaviours perceived as criminal	110
--	-----

In Loving Memory of
Deirdre O'Neill

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I'd like to thank all the participants who shared their views of and experiences of cyber-harassment. In particular, I'd like to thank those participants who have experienced cyber-harassment, for some of whom it was tough to drag up those memories. I'd also like to give special thanks to the police officers in Nottingham who gave up their precious time to share their views and experiences of dealing with cyber-harassment.

Thanks to my supervisors, Dr. Belinda Winder, Prof. Mark Griffiths, and Dr. Monica Whitty. Without their guidance and support this thesis could not have come into fruition. They have taught me a lot. I'd like to thank Steph Walker, Matt Henn, and Sandra Odell for their continued support, words of wisdom and encouragement. As my PhD journey began in Belfast, I'd like to thank all the staff in Queen's University, Belfast who helped me to begin this process.

Above all, I'd like to thank my Mum who sadly passed away during my PhD. Her love and devotion saw me through my PhD; she gave me strength to keep going and stay the course and I dedicate this thesis to her memory. I will never forget you!

Thanks to the rest of my family - Dad, Jim, Brendan, and Michael for listening to me – I know I was equally nightmarish through the highs and lows. Especially to Dad who had the joy of moving me several times and always pretended to know what I was talking about. Sharing a cabin with you and Pat was definitely a highlight. Thanks to Barnie for our lengthy conversations about PhD life, and your encouragement throughout the course. Jim you are my rock! Thank you for listening to me, reading my drafts, sending me news clippings, and offering suggestions.

Last but definitely not least, I'd like to thank my PhD colleagues, especially Jenny, Sarah, Abby, Emily, Idil, Eddie, and Dan. I feel lucky and privileged to have met you all. Jen, you made Nottingham for me and I'll never forget our long afternoons pondering research questions, our late night discussions about methodology that can only be described as 'lively', and of course, our plan-making abilities.

Declaration

I declare that:

1. the thesis is not one for which a degree has been or will be conferred by any other university or institution;
2. the thesis is not one for which a degree has already been conferred by this university;
3. the work of the thesis is the candidate's own and that, where material submitted by the candidate for another degree or work undertaken by the candidate as part of a research group has been incorporated into the thesis, the extent of the work thus incorporated has been clearly indicated;
4. the composition of the thesis is the candidate's own work.

Candidate's contribution to the work:

I proposed the current research investigating victims' and non-victims' experiences and perceptions of cyber-harassing behaviours. I developed the idea and undertook all subsequent stages of the PhD project, with the supervision of my PhD supervisors. I formulated the methodologies used, conducted data collection, completed data analysis and interpreted the results. I reviewed, critically appraised, and interpreted the relevant literature in the context of my findings and composed the thesis.

Abstract

People are increasingly using the Internet and mobile phone technology to communicate with others in their daily lives. Despite researchers' claims that cyber-harassment is becoming increasingly widespread, little is known about the phenomenon. This thesis adopted a mixed methods approach to gain a holistic understanding of the experience of cyber-harassment, how it is perceived by non-victims, and police officers' perceptions of, and role in combating the crime.

Although cyber-harassment is a crime within the UK, prosecuted using the *Protection from Harassment Act* (1997), few may perceive it as such due to the virtual nature of the perpetrator's behaviour. Using data gathered in an online survey completed by 320 undergraduate students, principal axis factoring revealed three dimensions underlying perceived criminality of 18 cyber-harassing behaviours – *deception/disclosure*, *harassing messages*, and *malicious software*. Sending malicious software and harassing messages were perceived as criminal but participants were unsure about more ambiguous acts associated with deceiving or disclosing information to the victim. High Internet self-efficacious individuals (i.e., those who feel more in control of online interactions) were more likely than low Internet self-efficacious individuals to perceive malicious software as criminal. Low-agreeable individuals were more likely than high-agreeable individuals to perceive harassing messages as criminal. Whilst personality and Internet self-efficacy influenced perceived criminality for some cyber-harassing behaviours the findings were not consistent. However, females were more likely than males to perceive harassing messages and behaviours associated with deception/disclosure as criminal. Males were more likely than females to perceive sending malicious software as criminal.

Participants reported experiencing a range of cyber-harassing behaviours and males were more likely than females to receive malicious software, be subscribed to unwanted services, receive abusive/threatening messages via the Internet, or to report that someone sent their friends/family/work colleagues email messages in an attempt to damage their reputation. Internet self-efficacious individuals were less likely to receive harassing messages via the Internet or be subscribed to unwanted services. Agreeable individuals

were less likely to receive harassing messages to their phone, and neurotic individuals were unlikely to be subscribed to unwanted services.

Participants' ratings of upset following their experience of cyber-harassing behaviours were positively associated with the number of behaviours they experienced, and females were more upset than males. Personality and Internet self-efficacy were not associated with ratings of upset but upset was associated with specific behaviours, indicating that the nature of cyber-harassment was problematic for participants. Furthermore, interpretative phenomenological analysis of 12 victims' experiences revealed the impact of cyber-harassment resembled PTSD-like symptoms, highlighting the detrimental impact cyber-harassment can have on victims.

Despite the impact of cyber-harassment reported by victims, the qualitative research conducted for this thesis revealed that the virtual nature of their experiences caused confusion, as they struggled to understand whether their experiences were real in comparison to their offline experiences. The views of 17 non-victims and 8 police officers were subjected to thematic analysis which revealed victim-blaming tendencies. Non-victims were likely to blame the victim for their experiences and would offer support if they had adequate knowledge of the victim and evidence of cyber-harassing incidences. Police involvement in cyber-harassing cases was dependent on threats being made to the victim, and victims were perceived as unhelpful in providing evidence and following their advice. Non-victims viewed perpetrators more sympathetically than victims, and there was little understanding about the impact that cyber-harassment can have on victims. The findings from this research are discussed in terms of psychological theory, and suggest that 'just world' beliefs may play an important role in perceptions of cyber-harassment. A caveat is raised that the findings from this research are drawn from small, qualitative studies but the research provides some interesting insights to cyber-harassment, and it is hoped that the findings will be transferable to future research investigating the phenomenon.

Chapter 1: Overview

1.1 Overview of the Thesis

The past three decades have witnessed the explosion and rapid evolution of the Internet. Dutton, Helsper and Gerber (2009) reported that 70% of households within England and Wales had Internet access within their homes. This figure is rising every year with a rise of 3% between 2007 and 2009 (Dutton & Helsper, 2007; Dutton et al., 2009, respectively), suggesting that Internet access will continue to rise in the future. This illustrates the Internet is becoming more affordable and accessible, and has many advantages for users. For example, Turkle (1995) proposed the Internet provides individuals with the opportunity to play with their identity, and are likely to actualise their ‘true self’ during this play. Furthermore, Whitty and Carr (2003) proposed the Internet is a ‘safe place to play at love’ (p. 884). In addition to the Internet providing a safe place for individuals to engage in identity play, the Internet provides individuals with greater opportunity to keep in touch with friends and relatives (especially those who do not live geographically close), establish new relationships, and increase efficiency within the work place. However, there are disadvantages to using the Internet, which include the potential to be harassed in cyberspace.

Unlike offline harassment, which is recognised as existing prior to the introduction of the first piece of anti-harassment legislation in California 1990 (Meloy, 1998; Skoler, 1998), the potential to engage in cyber-harassing behaviours has existed (by definition) since the evolution of the Internet (Bocij, 2004). As the Internet becomes more accessible, perpetrators are provided greater opportunity to locate, and harass their victims. With the number of Internet users increasing every year (Dutton & Helsper, 2007), it is likely that instances of cyber-harassment will also increase (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004), with some proposing that instances of cyber-harassment will surpass instances of offline harassment (e.g., Bocij, 2004; Whitty & Carr, 2006). This indicates that cyber-harassment may represent a significant social problem in the future, providing justification for research in this area.

However, it is concerning that relatively little is known about cyber-harassment in comparison to offline harassment. For example, research investigating offline harassment has revealed patterns in terms of who perpetrates harassment, who is vulnerable to becoming a victim of harassment, the context surrounding instances of harassment, and proposals have been made to identify intervention strategies likely to cease certain types of perpetrators. In relation to cyber-harassment, little is known about perpetrator and victim characteristics, how to prevent victimisation and the impact on victims. Whilst there is a paucity of research in this area, the few studies that have been conducted suggest that cyber-harassment impacts on victims to the same degree as offline harassment on victims (Bocij, 2003; Sheridan & Grant, 2007). Whilst these studies focused on the impact of the perpetrators' behaviour on victims, it is possible that cyber-harassment will have wider implications for victims. For example, victims may fear stigmatisation from their peers, as the impact of cyber-harassment may be trivialised because it occurs in a virtual world. It is important for psychologists to better understand why, and how, cyber-harassment impacts on victims. By gaining a better understanding of these issues, psychologists will be in a better position to identify strategies that can be used to prevent individuals from being victimised, and to help victims cope with cyber-harassing experiences.

In conjunction with recruiting cyber-harassed victims, researchers need to cast a wider net to provide a more complete understanding of the phenomenon. This thesis recruited cyber-harassed victims, their peers, and police officers because the perceptions of victims' peers and police officers will contribute to individuals' experiences of cyber-harassment. For instance, if the impact of cyber-harassment is trivialised, victims may be unlikely to seek help to help them cope with their experiences.

Whilst the perceptions of police officers and victims' peers will contribute to their cyber-harassing experience, their perceptions are also important as they contribute to the success of the judicial system when prosecuting perpetrators. Victims' accounts of cyber-harassment indicate that police officers do not take their allegations of harassment seriously (e.g., Wood & Wood, 2002). However, researchers have not recruited police officers to evaluate their perceptions, and such reports are dated in relation to the fast pace of the evolution of the Internet. It is important to further understanding of police officers' perceptions of cyber-harassment. If police officers trivialise cyber-harassment, research

can contribute to better training for police officers. However, if police officers do not trivialise cyber-harassment, research can contribute to strategies to better educate the public about police procedures. Increased awareness of cyber-harassment may contribute to greater instances of reporting of instances to the police, which ultimately may contribute to reducing the prevalence of cyber-harassment.

Should cases involving cyber-harassment proceed through the judicial system and be brought before court, the perceptions of victims' peers will be crucial in the prosecution of perpetrators. Within the UK, perpetrators are prosecuted using the *Protection from Harassment Act (1997)*, which applies the test of reasonableness. This means that the perpetrator's behaviour will be judged by the reasonable person's standard. However, current research has failed to illustrate how peoples' perceptions of cyber-harassment may affect the prosecution of perpetrators.

This thesis contributes to existing research in this field by providing a more complete picture of cyber-harassment. Quantitative methods have predominantly been used to examine cyber-harassment. However, to provide a more complete understanding of the phenomenon, this thesis has incorporated quantitative and qualitative methods. In conjunction with quantitative methods, qualitative methods are deemed suitable as cyber-harassment is a relatively new area, and qualitative research is needed to fully explore the phenomenon. Furthermore, the majority of research conducted in this thesis has been conducted online. Therefore, the thesis will contribute to understanding about conducting qualitative research using *Instant Messenger* as a research tool. Four studies will be used to describe and evaluate the meaning of cyber-harassment to victims, and non-victims' perceptions of the phenomenon, with particular focus on perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

This thesis explores victim and non-victim perceptions of cyber-harassment within the UK. The aims of the thesis are: to determine whether people perceive cyber-harassing behaviours as illegal; to determine whether Internet self-efficacy and the 'Big Five' personality characteristics predict perceived criminality of cyber-harassment; to further the

understanding of the experience of cyber-harassment by exploring victims' perceptions of cyber-harassment and evaluating the impact of cyber-harassment; and to identify and evaluate the support available to cyber-harassed victims by exploring non-victims' perceptions of the phenomenon.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions were examined to fully address the aims and objectives of the research:

1. Are cyber-harassing behaviours perceived as criminal?
2. Does gender, Internet self-efficacy and the 'Big Five' personality characteristics predict individuals' judgements about the criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours?
3. Does gender, Internet self-efficacy, or the 'Big Five' personality characteristics predict the likelihood of experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours?
4. What gender differences exist in the experience of cyber-harassment?
5. What are undergraduate students' experiences of cyber-harassment, and what meaning do they attach to those experiences?
6. How do undergraduate students cope with cyber-harassment, and how do they evaluate help they received in dealing with their experiences?
7. What are undergraduate students' perceptions of cyber-harassment, and in particular, cyber-harassed victims?
8. How do police officers perceive cyber-harassment, and what do they perceive their role to be in dealing with cases involving cyber-harassment?

1.4 Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1 provides an overview to the topic investigated in this thesis, and provides a rationale for conducting research in this field. The chapter outlines the aims and objectives of the research, and presents the research questions used to address the aims and objectives. The chapter concludes with an outline of the following chapters in the thesis.

Chapter 2 presents a review of existing literature examining online and offline harassment. Throughout the chapter, consideration is given to legal and definitional issues, and anti-harassment legislation is described and evaluated. The chapter presents current understanding of the nature and extent of offline and online harassment, and describes perpetrator and victim characteristics.

Chapter 3 evaluates the mixed methods approach in psychological research, and considers the philosophical issues associated with positivism and interpretivism in conducting quantitative and qualitative research. The chapter illustrates considerations of this thesis in conducting internet-mediated research, and concludes by outlining ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 presents the first empirical study that utilised quantitative methods to determine whether cyber-harassing behaviours were perceived as criminal, whether participants experienced any of the behaviours, and who participants imagined they would tell if they experienced cyber-harassing behaviours. The study examined the role of Internet self-efficacy and the ‘Big Five’ personality characteristics in predicting judgements of criminality and the experience of cyber-harassing behaviours.

Chapter 5 presents a qualitative study conducted with undergraduate students who had experienced cyber-harassing behaviours. Using *Instant Messenger* to conduct in-depth interviews, the study explored participants’ cyber-harassing experiences. The chapter provides in-depth accounts of cyber-harassment, and explores the impact of cyber-harassment on victims.

Chapter 6 presents a qualitative study conducted with undergraduate students who reported they had not experienced cyber-harassment. The study explored participants’ perceptions of cyber-harassment, with particular focus on participants’ perceptions of cyber-harassed victims, and their evaluations of the impact of cyber-harassment.

Chapter 7 presents a qualitative study conducted face-to-face with police officers in the Nottinghamshire Police Force. The study explored participants’ perceptions of cyber-harassment, and explored their role in dealing with cases involving cyber-harassment.

Chapter 8 provides a general discussion of the findings from empirical studies in this thesis. The main findings are discussed across each of the four studies in relation to the aims and objectives of the thesis. The implications of this research are discussed, and suggestions are made for future research in the area.

Chapter 2: A Psychosocial Overview of Stalking and Cyberstalking

2.1 Introduction

This chapter has two distinct parts with the first dealing specifically with offline harassment and stalking, and the second part focusing on cyber-harassment and cyberstalking. The terms ‘harassment’ and ‘stalking’ are often used interchangeably throughout the harassment literature as stalking is a severe form of harassment. Furthermore, in the UK, the *Protection from Harassment Act* (1997) does not mention the term ‘stalking’. Yet, stalking can be prosecuted using section four of the Act as a more serious form of harassment. This thesis has a particular focus on the perceived criminality of harassing behaviours within the UK. Therefore, in keeping with previous literature, and in the interest of brevity, the terms ‘stalking’ and ‘harassment’ are used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

The first section of this chapter deals exclusively with issues relating to offline harassment. The section begins with consideration of academic definitions of harassment, and illustrates authors’ motivations for utilising different definitions of harassment in their research. This thesis focuses on anti-harassment legislation within the UK, and in order to fully evaluate the UK legislation, the evolution of US-based legislation is described and evaluated. This discussion progresses to evaluation of UK-based anti-harassment legislation. When evaluating the *Protection from Harassment Act* (1997), the strengths and weaknesses of the Act are discussed. Of specific interest is the test of reasonableness, the focus on the impact of the perpetrator’s behaviour on the victim, and the application of the Act within the judicial system. The literature review provides discussion on the nature and extent of harassment to illustrate the significance of the problem, and explain what harassment is. The section concludes by illustrating victim and perpetrator characteristics.

The second section of this chapter deals exclusively with issues pertaining to cyber-harassment, and similarities and differences with offline harassment are considered throughout the section. The section evaluates the application of the *Protection from Harassment Act* (1997) in combating cyber-harassment and discusses academic definitions of the phenomenon. In order to explain what cyber-harassment is, the nature, extent, and

victim and perpetrator characteristics are described and evaluated. Anonymity is considered as a major difference between offline and online harassment, and theoretical explanations are provided to explain why perpetrators may choose to engage in harassing behaviours via the Internet. The section concludes by reviewing the literature relating to individuals' perceptions of cyber-harassment.

2.2 Stalking: Legal and definitional issues

At present, there is no single, universal definition of harassment or stalking. However, various definitions have been offered, which differ in emphasis on the threat posed by perpetrators, the range of behaviours engaged in by perpetrators, or the impact harassment has on victims. Focusing on the threat posed by stalkers, Meloy and Gothard (1995) coined the term 'obsessional follower' to describe individuals who engage in stalking behaviours. The term 'stalking' was specifically avoided, as the authors argued the term has been sensationalised in the media, and conjures stereotypical representations of stalking. They defined 'obsessional follower' as 'an abnormal or long term pattern of threat or harassment directed toward a specific individual' (p. 259). Similarly, Kienlen (1998) defined stalking as 'an individual's persistent and unwanted pursuit or obsessional harassment of another person causing him/her fear of bodily injury' (p. 51). Whereas, Mullen, Pathé, Purcell and Stuart (1999) emphasised the range of behaviours used by stalkers and defined stalking as 'a constellation of behaviours involving repeated and persistent attempts to impose on another person unwanted communication and/or contact' (p. 1244). Focusing on the impact harassment has on victims, McGrath and Casey (2002) defined stalking as 'the repeated uninvited monitoring and/or intrusion into the life and activities of a victim that is usually but not always, undertaken for the purpose of frightening or intimidating the victim or those around the victim' (p. 88).

Definitions of stalking that have been proposed have been criticised for not fully encapsulating the notion of stalking. Definitions focusing on threats to the victim (e.g., Meloy & Gothard, 1995; Kienlen, 1998) have been criticised because they exclude threats made towards the victim's friends and/or family, and damage to the victim's property (Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). Furthermore, Pathé and Mullen (1997) reported that 42% of stalked victims were not overtly threatened by their harassers, indicating that almost half of

victims are not threatened and may be more ambiguous. Thus, definitions which focus on threats made to the victim exclude many victims of stalking. Definitions that focus on the harasser's behaviour (e.g., Mullen et al., 1999) fail to incorporate the impact of harassment on the victim. Arguably, this is one of the most crucial determinants of harassment and failure to include this variable in definitions excludes a fundamental element of harassment. Arguably, the definition offered by McGrath and Casey is one of the most inclusive definitions. The definition includes the possibility of third party harassment of the victim's friends and/or family. Whilst other definitions stipulate the perpetrator must contact or intrude on the victim's life, McGrath and Casey's definition allows for the perpetrator to monitor the victim from a distance. Finally, their definition emphasises the importance of the impact of harassment on the victim.

2.2.1 The Evolution of Anti-Harassment Legislation

Media interest in what it called 'stalking' was increased following the stalking of celebrities (Perez, 1993). In the USA, actress Teresa Saldana was stalked by obsessive fan, Arthur Jackson, who travelled from Arizona to California to stab her (Saunders, 1998). Saldana was rushed to hospital and required twenty-six pints of blood but survived the attack. Jackson was arrested in 1982 and found guilty of attempted murder. Similarly, American actress, Rebecca Schaeffer, was stalked by Robert Bardo for two years before travelling from Scotland to America to murder her (Perez, 1993). Actress Jodie Foster was also stalked by John Hinckley Jnr., who shot US President Ronald Reagan in 1981 to gain her attention. Hinkley was arrested but found not guilty for the murder by reason of insanity. The media's portrayal of these cases of celebrity stalking sparked public concern about stalking, and legislation offering protection to potential victims was called for.

Amidst growing public concern and media interest, California enacted the first piece of anti-harassment legislation in 1990 (Saunders, 1998; Sheridan & Davies, 2001b). Whilst US anti-stalking legislation varies from state to state in terms of what constitutes stalking, the majority include credible threat, intent, and fear requirements (Saunders, 1998). The inclusion of these requirements has resulted in criticism, based on the use of narrowly defining terms. For example, Sheridan and Davies (2001b) note that stalkers often engage in behaviours that are innocuous, and Saunders (1998) described the case of 'Jane', whose

stalker deliberately engaged in behaviours that were within the law. Furthermore, Dennison and Thomson (2002) defined *actus rea* (i.e., intent) as the ‘accused intended to bring about a particular outcome by engaging in those acts’ (p. 544). However, intent can be difficult to prove, particularly in cases involving harassment or stalking. For example, a stalker may pursue a relationship with the victim, and in doing so may send the victim letters, and follow the victim. Whilst the victim may be frightened by someone following them, it would be difficult to prove the stalker intended to cause the victim harm during their pursuit. Furthermore, individual differences exist in the experience of fear. As part of the National Violence Against Women survey conducted between 1995 and 1996 in America, Tjaden, Thoennes and Allison (2000) interviewed 8,000 men and 8,000 women about their experiences of stalking. They developed four categories of respondents: 1) non-victims; 2) self and legally defined victims; 3) self but not legally defined victims; and 4) legally but not self defined victims. They reported 61% of individuals who considered themselves victims of stalking did not meet the fear requirements of legislation. By narrowly defining credible threat, intent and fear requirements, US legislation has been criticised as perpetrators may evade prosecution (Petch, 2002).

Within the UK, anti-harassment legislation was not introduced until 1997, and benefitted from the criticisms made against US legislation (Petch, 2002). The *Protection from Harassment Act (PfHA)* 1997 was introduced in the UK to combat harassment and stalking. When discussing the introduction of the *PfHA*, it was noted in Parliament that perpetrators of harassment and stalking engage in varied and continuously evolving behaviours (Salter & Bryden, 2009). Thus, to evade the problems of perpetrators evolving their behaviour beyond the scope of legislation, the *PfHA* did not define harassment or stalking. The Act stipulates that ‘a person must not pursue a course of conduct a) which amounts to harassment of another, and b) which he knows or ought to know amounts to harassment of the other’ (s. 1). The Act requires a ‘course of conduct’ which is defined as behaviours that occur on one or more occasions (Salter & Bryden, 2009). Section 4 of the Act holds a provision for the prosecution of more serious forms of harassment, whereby the victim has been put in fear of violence. As the Act does not define harassment or stalking, it has a variety of uses, and has been used in cases involving harassment, nuisance neighbours and racially motivated crimes (Petch, 2002).

However, the *PfHA* has been criticised on the basis that failing to define harassment results in ambiguity, as measures of harassment are unclear (Dennison & Thomson, 2002; Petch, 2002). In a review of 12 studies, Sheridan and Davies (2001b) found that behaviours were common to all stalkers, including repeated communications, intrusions, property damage, threats to the person and actual assaults. These findings contradicted the Parliamentary view that perpetrators do not adhere to a list of behaviours (Salter & Bryden, 2009). However, the studies reviewed by Sheridan and Davies focused on erotomaniac participants, and the list of behaviours may be only applicable to this sub-group of stalkers. Furthermore, Tjaden, Thoennes and Allison (2000), found convergence between the public perception and legal definitions of stalking among 16,000 American participants. Therefore, whilst the *PfHA* has been criticised for being ambiguous, the convergence of public opinion with legal definitions of stalking suggests that harassment does not need to be rigidly defined. Thus, by not defining harassment, the *PfHA* avoids the problem whereby perpetrators amend their behaviours to remain within the confines of the law.

2.2.2.1 The Test of Reasonableness

In an attempt to avoid the problems associated with US legislation, the *PfHA* does not require intent to be proved. Rather, the reasonable person's standard (i.e., the test of reasonableness) is applied to the perpetrator's behaviour. This is evident as the Act stipulates 'the person whose course of conduct is in question ought to know that it amounts to harassment if a reasonable person in possession of the same information would think the course of conduct amounted to harassment of the other' (s.1). However, the test of reasonableness has been criticised (Smartt, 2001) on the basis that individuals differ in their perceptions of stalking (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004). For example, Hills and Taplin (1998) presented 172 participants with a vignette survey designed to measure their attitudes towards stalking. They reported gender differences in perceptions of stalking. For example, females were likely to report that if they were the victim depicted in the scenario, they would be worried, annoyed, concerned, and angry, whereas males reported they would be flattered by the perpetrator's behaviour. Females, compared to males, were more likely to perceive the perpetrator's behaviour as frightening, and report they would call the police regardless of the perpetrator making direct threats. Furthermore, all participants were more likely to contact the police if the perpetrator was a stranger compared to a prior

intimate. However, Hills and Taplin's study was criticised as male participants were asked to imagine being stalked by a female perpetrator, which contradicts research illustrating that male victims are more likely to be targeted by male perpetrators (e.g., Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

In another study, Phillips, Quirk, Rosenfield and O'Connor (2004) reported gender differences in a series of vignette studies with a total of 496 undergraduate students. The second study was similar to the first study but the vignettes were redesigned to reflect the New York state anti-harassment legislation. Both studies indicated gender differences in perceptions of stalking similar to the findings of Hills and Taplin. Females were more likely than males to perceive the vignettes as examples of stalking. Furthermore, all participants were more likely to perceive the perpetrator's behaviour as stalking if the perpetrator and victim were strangers prior to the onset of stalking.

The existence of gender differences in perceptions of stalking indicate that individuals hold stereotypical views of stalking, which may be informed by media portrayals of the phenomenon (Spitzberg & Cadaz, 2002). As illustrated at the beginning of this chapter, the media played an important role in labelling 'stalking', reporting high-profile cases, and raising public awareness and concern about the phenomenon. According to Spitzberg and Cadaz (2002), media reports have contributed to a stalking myth: stalking affects women, and usually involves a man who suffers from mental illness, is a stranger to the victim, and is unrelated to courtship behaviours. However, media reports focus on atypical, newsworthy, sellable topics, which are reported in a typical manner. Furthermore, gender stereotyping may contribute to the perceived greater risk from males towards females than from females towards males. Media reports on stalking result in the creation and reinforcement of stalking stereotypes.

The just world hypothesis may also explain why a case is more likely to be labelled as stalking if the perpetrator and victim were strangers prior to the onset of stalking behaviours. Lerner and Miller's (1978) 'just world' hypothesis stipulates that people have a need to believe in a world that is just, and people get what they deserve. Belief in a just world is adaptive because it allows individuals to perceive their environment as safe and controllable. If individuals are faced with injustice, cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957)

motivates them to address the imbalance between their belief in a just world and the injustice. This is achieved by either compensating the victim, or convincing themselves that the victim is responsible for their own fate. Sheridan, Gillett, Davies, Blaauw and Patel (2003) tested the just world hypothesis in relation to perceptions of stalking. They recruited 168 undergraduate students to participate in a vignette survey, with the vignettes varying in terms of the victim's gender, and the prior victim-perpetrator relationship (i.e., ex-intimate, acquaintance, or stranger). In line with previous research, vignettes were more likely to be labelled as stalking when the perpetrator was a stranger or acquaintance, rather than when the perpetrator was an ex-intimate. The authors concluded victims were perceived as more to blame if they had a previous relationship with the perpetrator as they had the opportunity to give the perpetrator some cause for instigating stalking. More recently, Scott, Lloyd and Gavin (2010) presented vignettes to 315 undergraduate students in the UK and Australia. The prior relationship between the perpetrator and victim was manipulated to depict stalking by an ex-partner, acquaintance or stranger. They reported similar findings to Sheridan et al. as participants were more likely to perceive the vignette as stalking when the perpetrator was a stranger or acquaintance of the victim than if an ex-partner. By perceiving stalking to occur between strangers, individuals can protect themselves from the possibility of stalking occurring to them. Individuals can justify that stalking will not occur if they do not engage with strangers, or by adjusting their behaviour in ways they believe will diminish the chances of being stalked.

In relation to the test of reasonableness, the research described suggests females are more sensitive to harassment than males. Furthermore, individuals have prototypical ideas that stalking victims are female, with a male perpetrator, who is a stranger to the victim. This has serious implications for jury members who judge whether a perpetrator is guilty of harassment (Dennison & Thomson, 2002). If the case presented to jury members does not fall in line with the stereotypical view of stalking, jury members may not perceive the case as stalking. For example, cases involving a male ex-intimate of a female victim may not be perceived as stalking. This evidence has resulted in a principal criticism of the *PfHA*.

2.2.2.2 The Victim-Defined Crime

Whilst harassment is not defined within the *PfHA*, the impact of the perpetrator's behaviour on the victim is a crucial determinant of whether a crime has taken place (Petch, 2002). This is evident as the Act stipulates any behaviour that causes the victim alarm or distress, or fear of violence (PfHA, 1997). Petch (2002) notes the emphasis on the victim's response to harassment is a unique feature within UK criminal law, and deviates from US-based legislation that relies on the perpetrator's behaviour and intent to harass the victim. Arguably, the emphasis on the victim's response is a major strength of the Act.

Indeed, there is consensus that stalking has a detrimental impact on victims, and the impact of stalking has been referred to as 'emotional rape' and 'psychological terrorism' (Pathé & Mullen, 1997; Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004). Table 1 provides a summary of evidence of the impact of harassment on victims.

Table 1: Summary of Research evaluating the Impact of Stalking on Victims

Authors	Sample	Symptoms Reported by Stalking Victims
Ashmore, Jones, Jackson & Smoyak (2006)	Mental Health Nurses (n = 112, of which 50% self-defined victims of stalking) 22 – 60 years	54% Felt afraid 46% Increased anxiety 43% Felt less relaxed 34% Decrease in happiness 30% Felt less healthy 30% Increased stress 29% Felt less outgoing 25% Felt less confident 25% Sleeplessness 21% Felt helpless 18% Felt irritable 16% Depression 13% Nightmares 13% Felt less competent 13% Emotional numbness 11% Lost friendships
Blaauw, Winkel, Arensman, Sheridan & Freeve (2002)	Self-defined victims (n = 241) 19 – 82 years	13% Anxiety & Insomnia 12% Somatic symptoms 11% Social dysfunction 7% Severe depression
Budd & Mattinson (2000)	General Population (n = 9,988, of which 12% were victims of stalking) 16 – 59 years	92% Felt annoyed/irritated 75% Fairly distressed 59% Avoided places/people 42% Increased personal security 35% Socialised less 31% Fear of violence against them 27% Fear of violence against friend/relative 17% Fear of sexual offence against them
Nicastro, Cousins &	Victims of Stalking &	80% Fearful

Spitzberg (2000)	Domestic Violence (n = 55) Age unavailable	43% Felt threatened 38% Feared minor physical harm 33% Increased nervousness 29% Felt anger 20% Felt annoyed 11% General stress 11% Physical illness 9% Depression 5% Sleeplessness 5% Feared major physical harm 4% Nightmares 4% Loss of appetite 4% Headaches 2% Anxiety attacks
Pathé & Mullen (1997)	Stalked Victims (n = 100)	83% Heightened anxiety 82% Changed their usual activities 75% Feelings of powerlessness 74% Chronic sleep disturbance 73% Increased personal security 70% Decreased social outings 65% Aggressive thoughts towards the perpetrator 53% Decrease/cessation in work/school attendance 55% Excessive tiredness/weakness 55% Intrusive recollections and vivid flashbacks 47% Increased severity and frequency of headaches 45% Appetite disturbances 39% Moved home 37% Post-traumatic stress disorder 37% Changed work/school/career 30% Persistent nausea 27% Problems with indigestion 24% Seriously considered/attempted suicide 23% Increased alcohol/cigarette consumption

As can be seen in Table 1, victims of harassment report a variety of social and psychological symptoms. Pathé and Mullen (1997) propose that changing lifestyle habits is a universal response to being stalked, and is indicative of the impact of stalking. Stalked victims tend to increase their personal security, reduce social outings, lose days at work, stop going to or change their place of work, relocate home, avoid places and/or people, attend self-defence courses, have access to weapons, and increase their alcohol and/or tobacco consumption (Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Pathé & Mullen, 1997; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Some changes to one's lifestyle are more severe than others (e.g., relocating home in comparison to avoiding places the perpetrator may be). These findings may suggest a positive correlation between stalking severity and the lifestyle changes made by victims.

Many of the symptoms listed in research investigating the impact of harassment on victims are listed in the DSM-IV criteria of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (APA, 2000). According to the DSM-IV, there are two criteria for PTSD, and both of the criteria must be met in order for a diagnosis of PTSD. The first criterion involves exposure to a traumatic event that involves a serious injury or threat to one's physical integrity. The second criterion is that it caused the victim intense fear, helplessness, or horror. Symptoms of PTSD include re-experiencing the event, avoidance and emotional numbing, mistrust, reduced self-esteem, and fear of violence.

Pathé and Mullen (1997) reported that 37% of stalked victims met the DSM-IV criteria of PTSD; they noted a further 18% of victims reported PTSD symptoms but did not meet the DSM-IV criteria. Whilst participants in the studies summarised in Table 1 may not have had PTSD, the symptoms reported by participants fall along the PTSD spectrum. For example, Ashmore et al. (2006) and Nicastro et al. (2000) reported victims experienced nightmares (13% and 4%, respectively) following their experiences of stalking. Furthermore, Pathé and Mullen (1997) reported 55% of victims experienced intrusive recollections and vivid flashbacks of stalking events. These symptoms are indicative of re-experiencing the event described in the DSM-IV as a symptom of PTSD. Avoidance and emotional numbing is evident in participants suffering from depression, and avoiding places and/or people (Ashmore et al., 2006; Blaauw et al., 2002; Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Nicastro et al., 2000). Ashmore et al. reported participants felt less outgoing, less confident, and less competent, which is indicative of reduced self-esteem, and fear was reported by participants in all studies depicted in Table 1. Reductions in self-esteem have also been found among victims of domestic violence (Douglas & Dutton, 2001; Zosky, 1999), and rape (Kahn, Jackson, Kully, Badger & Halvorsen, 2003), indicating that reduced self-esteem is a common reaction to crime victimisation. However, it is difficult to make comparisons between studies as the target populations varied from the general population to victims identified in forensic case files of stalking, and some studies included self-defined victims. Furthermore, Tjaden, Thoennes and Allison (2000) noted as part of the National Violence against Women survey, that when participants were allowed to self-define as victims, prevalence rates tripled for men and doubled for females. Consequently, victims may have differed across studies in terms of the severity of stalking they experienced.

Despite problems in making comparisons across studies, it is clear that harassment causes victims stress. Stress is defined as ‘a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources’ (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 19). According to their stress model, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) theorise that individuals engage in a dynamic interplay of primary and secondary appraisal processes when evaluating the cost and benefits of all environmental encounters. Primary appraisals can be irrelevant, benign or stressful, with stressful appraisals consisting of harm/loss, threat and challenge appraisals. When encounters are appraised as stressful, individuals evaluate how, and whether, they can cope with the situation. These coping evaluations are part of the secondary appraisal processes.

Pathé and Mullen (1997) suggested that lifestyle changes stalked victims make are universal, regardless of the severity of harassment, and are indicative of coping strategies victims use to cope with harassment. Drawing from Lazarus’ work on coping strategies, Spitzberg and Cupach (2003) identified five coping strategies used by stalked victims. Pathé and Mullen (1997) found that 23% of victims increased their alcohol and/or tobacco consumption, which reflects Spitzberg and Cupach’s first coping strategy of ‘moving inward’ (i.e., focusing on oneself). ‘Moving outward’ involves victims seeking help or assistance from third parties. However, gender differences exist as research suggests females are more likely to seek help than males (e.g., Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). ‘Moving with or toward’ involves victims trying to negotiate his/her relationship with the perpetrator. ‘Moving away’ occurs when the victim engages in avoidance strategies to ignore the perpetrator. Pathé and Mullen noted that 82% of victims changed their activities to avoid the perpetrator, indicating ‘moving away’ is a common strategy among victims. Finally, ‘moving against’ involves victims trying to hurt or intimidate the perpetrator. Arguably, victims who enrol in self-defence courses or carry make-shift weapons would fall into this category.

Whilst the studies described illustrate that harassed victims are negatively impacted by their experiences, measures of harassment include those individuals who have been harassed for a minimum of four weeks (e.g., Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Pathé & Mullen, 1997). However, this four week requirement may be restrictive as it may neglect victims who have been harassed for a shorter period of time. For example, Budd and Mattinson

(2000) noted, as part of the British Crime Survey (1995/1996), that one third of self-defined stalking victims were stalked for less than four weeks. This is a sizeable quantity of potential victims and failure to include this group of individuals may result in sampling bias.

In an attempt to identify the period at which the perpetrator's behaviour moves from being intrusive to harassing, Purcell, Pathé and Mullen (2004) recruited 2,257 participants to complete a survey measuring their experiences of harassment, and Goldberg and Hillier's (1979) General Health Questionnaire. The sample was representative of the Australian population, with the exception that individuals over 56 years were over-represented. Twenty-three percent of participants had been stalked and met the legal definitions of stalking in Australia. The researchers found that two weeks was a critical period, with 45% of victims being stalked for less than two weeks. After the crucial two week period, victims were subjected to more severe behaviours (including receiving unsolicited telephone calls, letters, faxes and emails, being followed or kept under surveillance), and were more likely to receive overt threats, have their property damaged, experience third party stalking, and be physically assaulted. Furthermore, victims targeted for more than two weeks reported a greater range of social and psychological symptoms compared to those targeted for less than two weeks. Purcell et al. concluded that two weeks is a critical period, after which the behaviours used by the perpetrator increased in range and severity, and the experience was more likely to negatively impact on victims. This study raises the question as to why the majority of studies use a lengthier cut-off point in determining whether individuals have been harassed. Consequently, studies that use the four-week cut-off point may result in sampling bias.

Despite this, the evidence described demonstrates that harassment has a wide range of socially and psychologically negative effects on victims. Arguably, the symptoms reported by victims in research illustrate they meet the requirements of the *PfHA* that harassment must cause the victim alarm or distress. However, gender differences have been found in relation to the self-reported impact of harassment. Budd and Mattinson (2000) found that females were more likely than males to report being distressed or upset by their harassing experiences. Furthermore, Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) found females were more likely than males to seek counselling, and Bjerregaard (2000) found females were more likely to

call the police than males. Males may perceive seeking help, or stating that they are distressed by a harassing experience as a sign of weakness or may experience different forms of harassment compared to females. For example, Bjerregaard noted that male victims were less likely to be threatened or physically harmed during a campaign of harassment.

Gender differences have also been reported in the experience of fear, which is applicable to section 4 of the *PfHA*, as the Act stipulates the victim must be put in fear that violence will be used against them. Bjerregaard (2000) noted that among a student population, females were twice more likely to report feelings of fear than males. Furthermore, fear is not experienced by all victims of harassment. For instance, Budd and Mattinson (2000) reported that 31% of harassed victims reported they feared violence would be used against them, 27% reported fear of violence against a friend or relative, and 17% reported fear that a sexual offence would be committed against them. Furthermore, the Act does not stipulate the severity of violence the victim may fear, and this may be problematic when prosecuting perpetrators. For example, Nicastro et al. (2000) reported that 80% of victims recruited from a forensic sample stated they experienced fear after they had been stalked. However, only 38% reported fearing minor physical harm, and 5% reported fearing major physical harm. Whilst the differences between minor and major physical harm are unclear, the evidence suggests the degree to which victims are placed in fear is variable, and this may impact on the effectiveness of the Act in protecting victims from harassment.

2.2.2.3 The Application of the Protection from Harassment Act

Since the introduction of the *PfHA*, the Act has been used extensively, and resulting prosecutions indicate the effectiveness of the Act. When victims report harassment to the police, the case is presented to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) who ultimately decides whether a case should proceed to court. Petch (2002) warned that most cases do not result in prosecution, and Harris (2000) warned the Act was rarely being used to prosecute stalking. However, Smartt (2001) noted that during the first nine months following the introduction of the Act, 4,989 cases were presented to the CPS, and within the first year 2,148 cases had resulted in prosecution. Furthermore, Salter and Bryden (2009) noted that in 2006, the *PfHA* had been used to prosecute 5,446 perpetrators of

harassment. The discrepancy between the number of cases presented to the CPS and the resulting prosecutions confirms Petch's warning that not all cases result in prosecution. Research conducted with the CPS would be beneficial to determine the criteria used to determine whether a case should proceed to court. However, likely reasons may include failure to provide evidence. Notably, the number of cases presented to the CPS has risen between 1999 and 2006. This may reflect growing public awareness of the Act, and that harassment is a crime, rather than indications of increasing prevalence.

Sheridan and Davies (2001b) criticised the Act because normal behaviours that cause annoyance are not distinguished from more serious harassing behaviours, and this may potentially lead to high numbers of cases presented to the CPS. However, Salter and Bryden (2009) note that within court, the usefulness of the Act is being 'reined in' to cover serious cases only. Furthermore, precedents have been set in court which defines the seriousness of cases. They describe Mr Conn's case, who accused his line manager of harassment after his manager shouted at him in front of other members of staff, threatened to smash a window, and threatened to assault Mr Conn. However, the manager's behaviour was not classed as harassment. Whilst this example contradicts the concerns of Sheridan and Davies, it serves to illustrate the ambiguous nature of the measurements of harassment, including severity, and fear. This has important implications for victims of harassment, and there is a need for legislators and the CPS to clarify what constitutes harassment when a case is presented to the CPS and the courts.

In conjunction with the problems in pursuing a harassment case within the judicial system, evidence suggests that some victims do not report their experiences to the police. In a sample representative of the UK general population, Budd and Mattinson (2000) reported, as part of the British Crime Survey 1995/1996, that 33% of victims reported their experiences to the police. Within the US, slightly higher rates were reported by Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) as 55% of females and 48% of males reported harassment to the police. Sheridan, Davies and Boon (2001a) reported that 92% of harassed victims reported their experience to the police. However, the sample from the latter study was drawn from individuals who contacted the *Suzy Lamplugh Trust*, a charity set up to help stalked victims. As participants in the study sought help from the charity, they may represent severe cases of stalking. Thus, the rates of reporting to the police are likely to be highly

inflated. With the exception of Sheridan et al.'s study, research indicates many victims do not report harassment to the police. Therefore, the cases presented to the CPS do not represent all victims of harassment.

Whilst it is concerning that some victims of harassment do not report their experiences to the police, few studies have addressed why victims choose not to do so. Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) reported that victims who did not report their experiences to the police choose not to because they believed the police would be unable to prevent the harassment. The discrepancy between the number of cases presented to the CPS and the number of prosecutions under the *PfHA* suggest there may be some degree of truth in victims' concerns. Furthermore, when victims report their experiences to the police, they tend to be dissatisfied with how their case is dealt with (Pathé & Mullen, 1997; Sheridan, Davies & Boon, 2001a). Reasons for dissatisfaction include refusal to help on the basis that the case is a 'domestic issue', disbelief or powerlessness of police officers in preventing the harassment from progressing, and ineffectiveness of warnings, arrests, and restraining orders (Blaauw, Winkel, Arensman, Sheridan & Freeve, 2002; Draucker, 1999; Morris, Anderson & Murray, 2002; Roberts & Dziegielewski, 1996; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Victims may anticipate these problems and decide not to report their experiences to the police.

In conjunction with believing the police cannot prevent harassment, victims may fear judgement from their peers and this may contribute to the under-reporting of the crime. Kenney (2002) note that 'secondary victimisation' occurs when victims are treated differently, often negatively, by members of their community, friends, and family. People may judge the victim's lifestyle, behaviour, and personality, and blame the victim for the crime occurring. 'Secondary victimisation' may be explained by the just world hypothesis, where people believe that individuals get what they deserve (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Consequently, victims may fear stigmatisation, and this fear may explain why victims are reluctant to report their experiences to the police.

Victims may also engage in self-blaming strategies which may negatively correlate with reporting harassment to the police. Victims of crime (such as domestic violence, stalking and rape) are often left with a feeling of powerlessness (Douglas & Dutton, 2001; Kahn,

Jackson, Kully, Badger & Halvorsen, 2003; Pathé & Mullen, 1997), which indicates feelings of reduced control. According to Thompson (1981), people are driven by a need to understand why stressful events occur to them. By understanding why stressful events occur, people can feel more in control of their situation. According to Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis and Gruen (1986), self-blame involves accepting responsibility for causing a stressful event, and is indicative of a coping style. Furthermore, Janoff-Bulman (1979) suggests that self-blame is an adaptive coping strategy. By blaming oneself for past negative events, one can control the occurrence of future negative events. In relation to harassment, some victims may blame some aspect of their own behaviour or character for causing or allowing themselves to be harassed. If victims engage in self-blaming strategies, they would be unlikely to report their experiences to the police. Whilst it is beyond the remit of this thesis, harassment research would benefit by determining whether self-blame predicts the likelihood to report harassment to the police.

2.2.3 The Nature and Extent of Stalking

In an attempt to evolve the understanding of stalking, research has sought to provide prevalence rates and descriptions of the behaviours that perpetrators engage in. Establishing the percentage of victims of stalking, within a given population, provides an indication of the extent of the problem, and identifies particular groups who may be vulnerable to stalking. Table 2 shows the prevalence of stalking found among different studies.

Table 2: The Prevalence of Stalking

Author	Sample Population	Prevalence Rates (in lifetime)
Ashmore, Jones, Jackson & Smoyak (2006)	Mental Health Nurses (n = 199)	50% of sample
Finney (2006)	General Population 16 – 59 year olds (n = 24,498)	23% females 15% males
Budd & Mattinson (2000)	General Population 16 – 59 year olds (n = 9,988)	16.1% females 6.8% males
Tjaden & Thoennes (1998)	General Population 18 – 80 year olds (n = 16,000)	8% women 2% men
Fremouw, Westrup & Pennypacker (1997)	Undergraduate Students 18-29 year olds (Study 1 – n = 294)	Study 1: 26.6% females 14.7% males

The prevalence rates for stalking victimisation range from 8% for women and 2% for males (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998) to 53% for females and 18% for males (Fremouw, Westrup & Pennypacker, 1997). The sampling strategy of studies may account for the difference in prevalence of stalking victimisation. Budd and Mattinson (2000) and Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) derived their sample from the general population in the UK and USA (respectively). Although the prevalence rates found in the UK were slightly elevated compared to the US, the rates are similar. Sheridan, Blaauw and Davies (2003) argue the prevalence rates of the studies by Tjaden and Thoennes, and Budd and Mattinson, are reliable and stable. Whilst the prevalence rates found in the studies highlight the pervasive nature of stalking, it is argued here that the findings are not reliable or stable. For instance, in a later version of the British Crime Survey (04/05), Finney (2006) reported that 23% of female and 15% of male participants had been stalked. These rates are higher than the earlier version of the British Crime Survey reported by Budd and Mattinson. Finney argues the rates from the 2004/2005 survey cannot be compared to earlier version because the design was different, and survey items were ordered differently. Another explanation may be that as awareness of stalking grows, victims are more able to label their experiences.

Whilst stalking appears to be relatively common among the general population, students appear to be especially vulnerable to stalking victimisation. Fremouw, Westrup and Pennypacker (1997) conducted two studies aimed to investigate the prevalence of stalking among students. In their first study, 299 participants completed a questionnaire reporting on their experiences of stalking either as a victim or a perpetrator. Few people (only 2% of males and no females) admitted to engaging in stalking behaviours suggesting the study was influenced by socially desirable responding. However, 27% of females and 15% of males reported being stalked. A second study was conducted using a revised version of the survey used in the first study and focused on the reporting of stalking victimisation. Results showed that 35% of females and 18% of males reported having been stalked. In both of these studies, the prevalence for stalking victimisation was slightly higher than found in studies targeting the general population and highlights the vulnerability of students to stalking victimisation. It is also possible that younger participants may differ from older participants in their perceptions of stalking and may regard certain behaviours

as stalking whereas older participants would not. Morewitz (2002) suggests that students represent a unique group because they are at an age where they are experimenting with romantic relationships, and potentially have more free time to engage in stalking than those employed in full-time jobs.

Notably, the largest prevalence rate reported here was a study conducted with mental health nurses. Ashmore, Jones, Jackson and Smoyak (2006) reported that 50% of mental health nurses had at least one experience of stalking. Of those who were stalked, 71% had been stalked within the year previous to the study. The researchers concluded that mental health nurses are placed at greater risk to stalking incidents because their profession exposes them to mentally ill people who may be more likely to engage in stalking behaviours. The finding that 50% of mental health nurses were stalked in this sample contrasts the rate of 12% found by Budd and Mattinson (2000). This serves to highlight that prevalence rates should be treated with caution, as methodological considerations have important outcomes on the research findings.

Providing estimates of the prevalence of stalking has been further complicated by instances of reports of false victimisation (Pathé, Mullen & Purcell, 1999; Sheridan, Blaauw & Davies, 2003). Pathé, Mullen and Purcell (1999) reported instances of people ($n = 12$) judged by the researchers to have falsely claimed stalking victimisation, and were referred by the courts, medical practitioners, and by themselves. The authors suggest that false claimants typically report a shorter duration of stalking, are more likely to seek help and less frequently report receiving letters or third party assaults by the perpetrator. False reports were judged to be provided by stalkers pre-empting victims' complaints, those with severe mental disorders, those who were previously stalked who were hypersensitive, factitious victims and malingerers. Factitious victims were those individuals who were seeking attention by adopting the victim status. Maligners were individuals who were trying to manipulate their own court cases, where they were being deemed as engaging in criminal behaviour. By reviewing case files, the identification of false reports of stalking is a highly subjective process. Whilst the study is small, it does suggest that people may falsely report being victims of stalking. The majority of research on stalking in the general population relies on self-report and quantitative methodologies. In such studies, it would be virtually impossible to determine whether the study is affected by false reporting, and this

may lead to greater prevalence rates. However, it is argued here, that whilst false reporting occurs, it occurs to a very small degree and would not affect prevalence rates to any great extent.

The prevalence of stalking is unclear, with rates differing, to a large extent, depending on the sampling strategy employed by researchers. However, if we take the smallest rate provided by Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) to be a cautious estimate, it indicates that stalking is not an uncommon phenomenon. The rates discussed illustrate that education about stalking should be targeted to certain groups (such as students, or those in some professions who may be exposed to stalkers) who are vulnerable to experiencing stalking. Whilst it is beyond the remit of this thesis, qualitative research may be necessary to determine why some victims of stalking experience fear whilst others do not, as fear is a legal requisite differentiating stalking and harassment.

Although the prevalence of stalking is indicative of the extent of stalking, descriptors of the types of behaviours engaged in by perpetrators have been necessary to explain the nature of stalking. Quantitative studies have typically provided participants with checklists of possible stalking behaviours, and have asked participants to indicate which behaviours they had experienced. Table 3 details the stalking behaviours reported in various studies aimed at describing the nature of stalking.

There is no uniform way of investigating the behaviours engaged in by stalkers, making it difficult to make comparisons across studies. For instance, Budd and Mattinson (2000) report the widest range of behaviours reported by victims of stalking. On one hand, researchers have reported the types of unwanted phone calls (such as silent and obscene, as reported by Budd and Mattinson). Yet, other researchers have grouped certain behaviours together (such as public approaches, as reported by Mullen, Pathé, Purcell and Stuart). However, the most common behaviours reported include receiving unsolicited telephone calls, being approached by the perpetrator, being followed or placed under surveillance, receiving written messages and gifts (Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Mullen, Pathé, Purcell & Stuart, 1999; Pathé & Mullen, 1997).

It is clear that threats made, or carried out, occur to victims of stalking. Threatening behaviours have included being physically intimidated, being touched and/or grabbed, being forced into sexual acts (Budd & Mattinson, 2000), threats made to third parties, being physically attacked, a third party being physically attacked (Mullen, Pathé, Purcell & Stuart, 1999), and having property damaged, including threatening to and/or killing a pet (Mullen, Pathé, Purcell & Stuart, 1999; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). This highlights that stalkers can be dangerous, and stalking as a crime should be taken seriously.

Table 3: Stalking Behaviours

Authors → Behaviours ↓		Budd & Mattinson (2000)	Tjaden & Thoennes (1998)	Mullen, Pathé, Purcell & Stuart (1999)	Pathé & Mullen (1997)
Phone calls	%	45 (silent)	61	78%	78%
	Females	25 (obscene)		[overall sample]	[overall sample]
	% Males	44 (silent 14 (obscene))	42		
Written communication & Gifts	%	27 (written)	33 (written & gifts)	65% (written)	62%
	Females	19 (gifts)		48% (gifts)	(written)
	% Males	27 (written 16 (gifts))	27 (written & gifts)	[overall sample]	50% (gifts) [overall sample]
Direct approaches	%	52 (forced to talk to perpetrator)		86% public approaches	79% (at home,
	Females	36 (refused to take no for an answer) 34 (outside house) 28 (outside work) 35 (touched or grabbed)		[overall sample]	workplace, or school) [overall sample]
	% Males	39 (forced to talk to perpetrator) 22 (refused to take no for an answer) 30 (outside house) 22 (outside work) 30 (touched or grabbed)			
Followed and/or surveillance	%	43 (followed)	82	73%	71%
	Females			[overall sample]	[overall sample]
	% Males	30 (followed)	72		
Threaten or use of violence	%	45 (physically intimidated)	29 (vandalised property)	58%	36%
	Females	27 (threatened violence) 19 (physical violence) 9 (sexual violence)	9 (threatened to or killed family pet)	(threatened violence against victim and a third party) 40% (damaged property)	(property damaged) 58% (overt threats)
	% Males	33 (physically intimidated) 32 (threatened violence) 24 (physical violence) 3 (sexual violence)	30 (vandalised property) 6 (threatened to or killed family pet)	36% (physically attacked)	

Budd and Mattinson (2000), and Tjaden and Thoennes (1998), reported the behaviours experienced by both male and female victims, and identified a gender effect on the

behaviours experienced. For example, Budd and Mattinson reported that female victims were more likely than males to be forced to talk to the perpetrator (52% and 39%, respectively), to be physically intimidated (45% and 33%, respectively), to be followed (43% and 30%, respectively), and to receive obscene phone calls from the stalker (25% and 14%, respectively). Similarly, Tjaden and Thoennes reported that female victims were more likely than males to receive unwanted phone calls (61% and 42%, respectively), and to be followed or placed under surveillance (82% and 72%, respectively). However, there were also similarities in the behaviours experienced by both male and female victims. For example, Budd and Mattinson reported that male and female victims experienced receiving silent phone calls (45% and 44%, respectively), and receiving written communications (27% and 27%, respectively), and being threatened with violence (27% and 32%, respectively). Tjaden and Thoennes also reported that male and female victims were both likely to receive unwanted written communications or items (27% and 33%, respectively). The gender differences and similarities found in victims' experiences of stalking indicate the types of behaviours male/female victims are likely to experience. This may be useful when educating people about the course of stalking. However, some of the behaviours reported (such as "refused to take no for an answer" or "being forced to talk to the perpetrator") are vague and do not provide much information on the nature of such behaviours. For example, it is unclear how someone is forced to talk to another person. Future research would benefit from making descriptions of the perpetrators' behaviour clearer.

Asking victims to use a checklist to indicate the behaviours they experienced fails to show how perpetrators use a variety of methods during their stalking campaign. Indeed, Mullen, Pathé, Purcell and Stuart (1999) have referred to stalking as a "constellation of behaviours" (p. 1244), and this may be portrayed more clearly by case studies. A case study reported by Draucker (1999) serves to illustrate the escalation in stalking behaviours that is regarded as being typical of stalkers. Mary met Harry when she was employed by him to complete her taxes. Initially, Harry's behaviour was limited to phoning her at home, and bringing her gifts. As his behaviour escalated, he made Mary aware that he had been recording her conversations, sent threatening letters, entered her home while she was out, and left nails on her driveway in an attempt to damage the tyres of her car. This case study illustrates

that a stalker's behaviour may initially appear benign. The more serious behaviours, such as threatening letters, may not appear as threatening if it was a one-off incident.

In another case, Jill met John at a party and they had a short but intimate relationship (Roberts & Dziegielewski, 1996). John stayed a night at Jill's house and when she returned from work the next evening he was still there. When Jill asked John to leave he threatened to hurt himself. John only left because another person became involved. John began to leave numerous telephone messages and, as his behaviour escalated, he visited Jill's workplace. These examples illustrate that a stalker's behaviour may not appear to be threatening unless the perpetrator's behaviour is considered as a whole.

2.2.4 Perpetrator and Victim Characteristics

Typologies of perpetrators have been proposed by several researchers to categorise who, and why, individuals engage in harassing behaviours. The purpose of typologies is to predict the severity of harassment posed by certain types of perpetrators, and intervention strategies best suited to types of perpetrators. Early research was based on the assumption that harassing perpetrators were erotomaniac (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2003), and the first typology by Zona, Sharma and Lane (1993) drew from knowledge of erotomania. Erotomania involves the delusional 'belief the target of attention, generally a person of higher social and economic status, bears genuine love for the erotomaniac individual' (Sheridan & Davies, 2001b, p. 135). Erotomania involves fate-based delusions, whereby the perpetrator believes that it is only a matter of time before their target realises that he/she is in love with the perpetrator (Perez, 1993). Furthermore, erotomaniac individuals will have no prior relationship with the victim (Sheridan & Davies, 2001b), and will 'go to great lengths to contact the person of their delusion' (Zona et al., 1993, p. 894). With the exception of their delusion, erotomaniac individuals behave normally (Zona et al., 1993).

Zona et al. (2003) analysed the forensic files of the first 74 cases involving harassment that were brought to the Threat Management Unit of the Los Angeles Police Department. They analysed the perpetrators' characteristics and formulated three categories of perpetrators. The first category was '*erotomania*', with perpetrators ($n = 7$) diagnosed with primary erotomaniac delusions. The majority of erotomaniac perpetrators were female ($n = 6$), who

targeted older males (n = 5). All perpetrators in this sub-category wrote letters to, and threatened, their victims. Furthermore, the majority (n = 5) visited the victim's home during their pursuit. '*Love obsessive*' formed the second category of perpetrators (n = 32), some of whom were judged to be similar to erotomaniac individuals. However, erotomania was one of several delusions, with erotomania being symptomatic of another primary mental illness. Other perpetrators within this category were 'in love' with the victim, but did not hold a delusion that the victim loved them. *Love obsessive* perpetrators were likely to be male (n = 28), and victims tended to be younger females (n = 30). Perpetrators were likely to write letters to their victim (n = 26), and visit the victim's home (n = 6), but least likely to threaten the victim (n = 6). The final category was '*simple obsessive*' (n = 35), comprised mostly of male perpetrators (n = 25) and female victims (n = 25). *Simple obsessive* perpetrators were most likely to threaten their victims (n = 23), and least likely to write letters to (n = 12), or visit their victim's home (n = 12). Perpetrators did not differ in terms of age (M = 35 years), but *erotomanics* (M = 125 months), and *love obsessive* (M = 146 months), engaged in harassing behaviours for significantly longer durations than *simple obsessive* (M = 5 months). These findings suggest that perpetrators who have relational goals are least likely to cease their harassing behaviours, and engage in a lengthier pursuit patterns, which may cause greater harm to victims. Contrary to previous speculation that stalkers suffered from erotomaniac delusions, the study illustrated that erotomania forms a small sub-group of harassing perpetrators (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2003).

Another typology was proposed by Kienlen, Birmingham, Solberg, O'Regan and Meloy (1998), and comprised of *psychotic* (n = 9) or *non-psychotic* (n = 16) perpetrators. Kienlen et al. analysed the forensic case files of 25 perpetrators referred by forensic examiners in Missouri between 1990 and 1995. On the basis of the forensic examiners' evaluations of the perpetrators' mental health, participants were categorised as either psychotic or non-psychotic, and all were facing criminal charges for stalking. Like Zona et al., Kienlen et al. reported no significant differences in the demographic characteristics of psychotic and non-psychotic perpetrators. Kienlen et al. noted that differences between psychotic and non-psychotic perpetrators in terms of who they harassed (e.g., psychotics less likely to pursue ex-partners), and behaviours they engaged in (e.g., psychotics more likely to visit

the victim's home). Furthermore, when psychotic perpetrators engaged in violence, the violence was less organised and unplanned in comparison to non-psychotic perpetrators.

The typologies offered by Zona et al. (1993) and Kienlen et al. (1998) have been criticised for being too simplistic (Boon & Sheridan, 2002; Sheridan, Blaauw & Davies, 2003). For example, psychotic perpetrators in Kienlen et al.'s typology were less likely to harass ex-intimates. However, evidence suggests that victims are most likely to be pursued by an ex-partner (see Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Thus, the majority of harassers would likely fall into the non-psychotic category. If the majority of harassers fall within one category, the explanatory power of a two-tiered typology would be significantly reduced, as it would fail to explain the majority of harassers.

In an attempt to provide a more comprehensive typology, Mullen, Pathé, Purcell and Stuart (1999) proposed a five category typology following their analysis of the forensic case files of 145 perpetrators convicted of stalking between 1993 and 1997. In their typology, Mullen et al. categorised perpetrators as *rejected* (n = 52), *intimacy seeking* (n = 49), *incompetent* (n = 22), *resentful* (n = 16), and *predatory* (n = 6). *Rejected* perpetrators wanted to reconcile with, or seek revenge against, the person who rejected them. Perpetrators in this category used significantly more methods of harassment than any other category, and were most likely to telephone their victim, and issue threats. *Rejected* perpetrators were most likely to cease harassment when issued with fines or when facing a custodial sentence. *Intimacy seeking* perpetrators were seeking to establish a relationship with the victim, but were likely to become jealous and enraged if their romantic advances were rejected by the victim. *Intimacy seeking* perpetrators were most likely to send the victim letters. Mullen et al. advised perpetrators within this category were unlikely to respond to legal intervention, and required psychiatric intervention. *Incompetent* perpetrators were similar to intimacy seeking perpetrators, but differed as they did not believe the victim reciprocated romantic feelings towards them. Incompetent perpetrators were described as intellectually limited and socially incompetent which hindered their ability to initiate a romantic relationship. Perpetrators were attracted to the victim, but were not infatuated, and were likely to have a history of harassing other individuals. Mullen et al. explained these perpetrators are easily dissuaded from harassing individuals. However, their history of harassing other individuals suggested they may acquire a new target. Half

of the *resentful* perpetrators held vendettas against individuals they believed had wronged them, and half were reported to have a general sense of grievance. Similar to rejected perpetrators, resentful perpetrators were also most likely to threaten their victims. However, resentful perpetrators were most likely to be enraged by legal intervention, resulting in an escalation of harassment towards the victim. Finally, *predatory* perpetrators were motivated by the desire to sexually attack the victim. They were likely to have previous convictions for sexual offences, and were least likely to telephone the victim. Considering previous convictions, perpetrators in this category were unlikely to cease their behaviour following legal intervention, and Mullen et al. suggested they should receive psychiatric intervention.

Mullen et al.'s (1999) typology has advantages over the earlier, more simplistic models proposed by Zona et al. (1993) and Kienlen et al., (1998). First, their typology involves a more diverse range of categories that can be used to explain a greater range of harassing perpetrator's motivations, the types of behaviours they engage in, and the threat posed to victims. Boon and Sheridan (2002) note that Mullen et al.'s typology is devised from the analysis of a greater number of participants in comparison to previous typologies. Consequently, Mullen et al. benefitted from a larger amount of data, which increases the validity of their research in comparison with earlier studies (Boon & Sheridan, 2002). Importantly, unlike earlier typologies, Mullen et al. describe legal and psychiatric intervention strategies that are most applicable to each category of perpetrators. This is an important benefit to psychiatrists and police officers who may deal with perpetrators in their daily working life.

Typologies have appeal as they appear to provide clear-cut illustrations of who perpetrates harassment, what to expect from certain types of perpetrators, and how to deal with them. However, Douglas and Dutton (2001) argue that typologies are often based on speculation, and a universal typology of harassing perpetrators has not been devised. Furthermore, harassing perpetrators may not fit neatly into a single category (Boon & Sheridan, 2002), which may reduce their explanatory power, or cause confusion among police officers or clinicians who are asked to intervene in cases involving harassment. Importantly, all of the typologies described are derived from clinical and forensic samples. However, individuals are unlikely to voluntarily admit to harassing another person (Fremouw, Westrup &

Pennypacker, 1997), rendering the empirical study of perpetrators limited to forensic samples. However, perpetrators who come to the attention of the criminal justice system are likely to over-represent perpetrators with mental illness, and are likely to be limited to severe cases of harassment. Consequently, typologies cannot be applied to all perpetrators of harassment, and descriptions of the more ‘typical’ harassers have been gained from victim’s accounts of harassment.

Table 4: Characteristics of Perpetrators and Victims of Harassment

Author	Sample	Perpetrators %	Victims %	Prior Relationship %	
				Males	Females
Sheridan, Davies & Boon (2001a)	Self-defined victims (n = 95) (2 – 70 years)	87 Male 7 Female 5 Multiple perpetrators	92 Females 7 Males 1 Couple	48 Ex-intimate 37 Acquaintance 12 Stranger	
Budd & Mattinson (2000)	General Population (n = 9,988) (16 – 59 years)	81 Men 19 Female	73 Females 27 Males	27 Ex-intimate 8 Relative 36 Acquaintance 28 Stranger	30 Ex-intimate 4 Relative 30 Acquaintance 35 Stranger
Nicastro, Cousins & Spitzberg (2000)	Stalking case files (n = 55)	93 Male 7 Female	93 Females 7 Males	60 Dating relationship 20 Married 9 Acquaintances 6 Separated/Divorced 2 Other relative 4 Strangers	
Mullen, Pathé, Purcell & Stuart (1999)	Stalkers (n = 145)	79 Male 21 Female (15 – 75 years)	[Not reported]	30 Ex-intimate 23 Professional relationship 11 Fellow employees 19 Acquaintances 14 Strangers	
Kienlen, Birmingham, Solberg, O’Regan & Meloy (1998)	Stalkers (n = 25) (24 – 69 years)	84 Male 16 Female	81 Females 19 Male	58 Ex-intimate 20 Acquaintance 12 Relative 8 Celebrity 1 Stranger (non-public)	
Tjaden & Thoennes (1998)	General Population (n = 16,000) (18 – 80+ years)	87 Males 13 Females	78 Females 22 Males	13 current/former spouse 13 current/former cohabiting partner 10 current/former girlfriend 2 Other relative 34 Acquaintance 36 Stranger	38 current/former spouse 10 current/former cohabiting partner 14 current/former boyfriend 4 Other relative 19 Acquaintance 23 Stranger
Pathé & Mullen (1997)	Stalked victims (n = 100)		83 Females 17 Males	29 Ex-intimate 25 Professional relationship 21 Casual social encounter 16 Stranger 9 Work colleague	

Table 4 illustrates the percentages of perpetrators and victims, and the prior relationship between perpetrators and victims reported during empirical investigation of harassment. The percentages of male perpetrators range from 79% (Mullen, Pathé, Purcell & Stuart, 1999) to 87% (Sheridan, Davies & Boon, 2001a; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), with differences attributable to different sampling strategies and definitions of harassment. For example, Sheridan et al. recruited self-defined victims who contacted the *Suzy Lamplugh Trust* for help with harassment, and evidence suggests females are more likely than males to seek help following harassment (e.g., Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). In conjunction with help seeking, evidence suggests that females are likely to be harassed by males (e.g., Bjerregaard, 2000). Furthermore, the definition used by Mullen et al. did not stipulate the perpetrator had to threaten the victim, whereas the definition used by Tjaden and Thoennes mentioned the perpetrator's behaviour could threaten the victim. The inclusion of threats may have prompted more females to report harassment as males are more likely to threaten their victims than females (Budd & Mattinson, 2000).

However, there is evidence of females engaging in harassing behaviours, with percentages ranging from 7% (Sheridan et al., 2001) to 21% (Budd & Mattinson, 2000). This evidence contradicts the stereotypical perception that stalkers are males, and may have arisen because of methodological differences between the studies. As Sheridan et al. recruited self-defined victims, their considerations of their harassing experiences may have, in part, been due to conforming to stereotypical views on harassment. However, as part of the British Crime Survey, the words 'stalking' and 'harassment' were not used when asking participants to report their experiences. By excluding these terms, the authors may have avoided triggering stereotypical representations of harassment. Thus, participants may have felt more comfortable in reporting harassment perpetrated by females.

Evidence suggests harassed victims that are females range from 81% (Kienlen et al., 1998) to 93% (Nicastro, Cousins & Spitzberg, 2000), whereas, male victims are reported to range from 7% (Nicastro et al., 2000) to 27% (Budd & Mattinson, 2000). In a similar vein to percentages of perpetrators, percentages of victims are attributable to differences in sampling strategies. For instance, the sample used by Nicastro et al. included victims of stalking and domestic violence, whereas Kienlen et al.'s sample was restricted to victims of stalking. The inclusion of domestic violence victims is likely to have over-represented

females within Nicasastro et al.'s study compared to Kienlen et al.'s findings. Over-representation of females within Nicasastro et al.'s study would have lead to inflated rates of female victims and under-inflated rates of male victims.

There is consensus that the majority of perpetrators are known to their victims prior to the onset of harassment (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Pathé, 2002). Evidence suggests the largest single category illustrating the prior perpetrator-victim relationship is the ex-intimate category, with percentages ranging from 29% (Pathé & Mullen, 1997) to 86% (Nicasastro et al., 2000). Whilst ex-intimates are the largest single category, the range of percentages provides little information. Furthermore, studies have not consistently defined 'ex-intimate' prior relationship between perpetrators and victims of harassment. For example, Purcell et al. (2004) included relatives other than husbands or wives within the ex-intimate category. Furthermore, some studies have divided the category further (e.g., Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Nicasastro et al., 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). For example, Nicasastro et al. reported that 60% of perpetrators were dating the victim, 20% were married, and 6% were separated or divorced prior to the onset of harassment.

Evidence suggests there are gender differences within the ex-intimate category of the perpetrator-victim relationships. Budd and Mattinson (2000) reported females were marginally more likely than males to be harassed by an ex-partner. Furthermore, males were more likely than females to be harassed by a relative. Similarly, Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) reported females were more likely than males to be harassed by a current or ex-spouse or girlfriend. Furthermore, males were more likely than females to be harassed by a current or former girlfriend/boyfriend. However, the differences in percentages portray small gender differences.

Despite the differences in percentages across studies of ex-intimates to engage in harassment, ex-intimates form the largest single category within each study, suggesting a link between harassment and domestic violence (Douglas & Dutton, 2001). Coleman (1997) noted that leaving an abusive partner is dangerous, as the abused partner may experience harassment as a result. Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) reported that perpetrators who were ex-intimates of the victim were more likely to engage in harassment following the dissolution of the relationship than during the relationship. Furthermore, victims who

are harassed by ex-intimates are more likely to be emotionally abused, and physically and/or sexually attacked by the perpetrator (Sheridan & Davies, 2001a; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Pathé and Mullen (1997) explain that perpetrators who had an intimate relationship with the victim prior to the onset of harassment are highly emotionally invested in the relationship. When perpetrators are invested in their pursuit of their victim, the pursuit tends to be more severe, dangerous, and persistent. Similarly, Jason, Reichler, Easton, Neal and Wilson (1984) explain that sex-role stereotypes may account for the occurrence of females being targeted by ex-partners. They highlight that females are stereotyped as inferior to males, and when females end a relationship, the male will become angry and frustrated with the female's assertive behaviour. Although sex-role stereotyping may explain why females are targeted by males, it does not explain why males become the targets of harassment or why the perpetrator may display anger or frustration towards the victim.

Attachment theory has also been applied to explain stalking between ex-intimates. According to attachment theory, secure early attachments with the caregiver contribute to healthy development in adulthood (Bowlby, 1980). In contrast, the failure of a caregiver to meet a child's needs results in the development of working models of the self as unworthy (Bowlby, 1973), and psychopathology in adulthood (Ainsworth, 1989). Meloy (1998) argues that stalking behaviours are a consequence of insecure attachment. When a relationship ends, feelings of unworthiness are reinforced in the insecure perpetrator, and triggers psychopathological attachment behaviours that are designed to regain proximity to the attachment figure (Kamphius, Emmelkamp & deVries, 2004). However, attachment theories have been criticised for explaining stalking as a pathological reaction to rejection, which stems from investigations into clinical and forensic samples (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Spitzberg & Veksler, 2007).

In an attempt to explain the more typical cases of stalking, Spitzberg and Cupach (2003) applied Bagozzi's (1992) goal pursuit theory to stalking. According to goal theory, decisions about the achievability of goals occur in a three-stage process. During the first 'appraisal of means' stage, individuals consider the behaviours required to achieve the goal. The second stage involves 'the formation of instrumental beliefs', which involves the consideration of whether the behaviours identified will result in goal attainment. Finally,

individuals evaluate their own self-efficacy in achieving their goal (Bagozzi & Edwards, 2000). The desirability of goal attainment is evaluated by considering the consequences of achieving the goal (Bagozzi, Baumgartner & Pieters, 1998). The consequences of goal attainment include evaluation of the emotions that are perceived to accompany goal attainment. Furthermore, goals are considered to be hierarchical in nature, with higher-ordered goals being associated with feelings of self-worth and happiness. In contrast, lower-ordered goals can be abandoned more easily as they are not linked to one's self-worth.

In application of goal theory to stalking, Spitzberg and Cupach (2003) refer to relational goal pursuit to describe how and why stalking may occur when a relationship ends. In relation to stalking, the perpetrator's end goal is to have a relationship with the victim, and the stalking directed behaviours are the means by which they believe the goal can be achieved. The stalker associates highly positive emotions with having a relationship with the victim and non-attainment will result in highly negative emotions (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004). Furthermore, relationship attainment (a lower-ordered goal) becomes linked with higher-ordered goals of self-worth and happiness, and a relationship with the victim becomes of crucial importance. When rejected by the victim, the perpetrator experiences rumination and negative emotional flooding, which serve as a reminder of the consequences of non-attainment of the relational goal and threatens the perpetrator's self-worth. It is argued here that this theory better explains perpetrators' reactions of anger to a partner who attempts to end their relationship.

The next largest category illustrating the prior perpetrator-victim relationship is acquaintances, with percentages ranging from 9% (Nicastro et al., 2000) to 37% (Sheridan, Davies & Boon, 2001a). Pathé (2002) explained that acquaintances involve perpetrators who have had social encounters with the victim prior to the onset of harassment. Whilst some authors separate work colleagues and those who had a professional relationship with the victim (e.g., Mullen et al., 1999; Pathé & Mullen, 1997), others include these individuals within the broader acquaintance category (e.g., Finney, 2006). Sheridan and Davies (2001a) reported that victims who were an acquaintance of the perpetrator are less likely to be attacked. However, perpetrators may physically attack third party victims (such as friends or relatives of the victim), and perpetrators are less likely to be prosecuted. The

decreased likelihood of perpetrators within this category attacking the victim may result lower rates of prosecution.

There is a myth associated with harassment that perpetrators target victims with whom they have no prior relationship to (i.e., strangers) (deBecker, 2002; Pathé, 2002; Spitzberg & Cadaz, 2002). Contrary to this, evidence suggests strangers engaging in harassment represent the smallest prior relationship category, with rates ranging from 4% (Nicastro et al., 2000) to 14% (Mullen et al., 1999). Whilst some studies have reported gender differences in being harassed by a stranger, there are inconsistencies across studies. Budd and Mattinson (2000) reported that females (35%) were more likely to be harassed by a stranger than males (28%). Conversely, Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) reported that males (36%) were more likely to be harassed by strangers than females (23%). Unfortunately, both studies provided descriptive statistics, and it is unclear whether gender differences are statistically significant. However, much of the evidence of strangers engaging in harassment has derived from victims' accounts, and may not reliably reflect the incidents of stranger-harassment. For example, perpetrators may know the victim but have not yet revealed their identity to the victim. Consequently, victims may report the perpetrator is a stranger, rather than unknown.

Table 5 provides describes further demographic information relating to perpetrators of harassment reported in various studies. The average age of perpetrators ranges from 35 years (Purcell et al., 2001) to 41 years (Ashmore et al., 2006), suggesting that harassment is perpetrated by older individuals. This finding contradicts the maturation hypothesis, which stipulates that as people age they become more mature and less likely to engage in criminal behaviour (Morowitz, 2002). However, the youngest perpetrator (aged 11 years) was reported by Sheridan et al. (2001a) and the oldest perpetrator (aged 75 years) was reported by Mullen et al. (1999). The age range of perpetrators illustrates that harassment is not restricted to being perpetrated by individuals aged in their thirties or forties.

Table 5: Demographics of Perpetrators of Harassment

Author	Gender (n)	Age	Employment Status
Ashmore et al. (2006)	Male (46) Female (10)	17 – 60 years (M = 41)	Not Reported
Purcell et al. (2001)	Female (40)	15 – 60 years (M = 35)	35% unemployed
Sheridan et al. (2001a)	Male (82) Female (7)	11 – 73 years (M = 36)	51% Employed 23% Unemployed

		Multiple (5) Unknown (1)	10% Unknown 7% Students 4% Various 3% Retired 2% Self-employed Not Reported
Nicastro et al. (2000)	Male (51) Female (4)	20 – 59 years (M = 36)	
Mullen et al. (1999)	Male (115) Female (30)	15 – 75 years (Median = 38)	56% Employed 39% Unemployed 5% Unknown
Kienlen et al. (1997)	Male (21) Female (4)	24 – 69 years (M = 38)	60% unemployed

Speculative accounts of harassment suggest that perpetrators are often unemployed (e.g., Meloy, 1998), providing perpetrators with more free time to engage in harassing behaviours. There is some evidence to support this speculation as Kienlen et al. (1997) reported 60% of perpetrators were unemployed. However, the majority of perpetrators in the study had a prior criminal record (63%), which may contribute to unemployment. Furthermore, the findings were based on a small forensic sample (n = 25). Thus, findings from the study must be treated with caution as they cannot be generalised to a wider population of perpetrators. Contrary to speculation, the majority of evidence suggests that harassing perpetrators are employed, self-employed, or students (Mullen et al., 1999; Purcell et al., 2001; Sheridan et al., 2001a).

Table 6: Demographics of Victims of Harassment

Author	Gender (n)	Age	Employment Status
Blaauw et al. (2002)	Female (214) Male (27)	19 – 82 years (M = 43)	59% Employed
Sheridan et al. (2001a)	Female (88) Male (8)	2 – 70 years (M = 34)	47% Employed 18% Unemployed 10% Students 8% Pre-school 4% Self-employed 2% Retired 1% Unknown
Nicastro et al. (2000)	Female (51) Male (4)	14 – 52 years (M 33)	60% Unemployed

Table 6 provides further demographic information relating to harassed victims reported in research. The average age of harassed victims range from 33 years (Nicastro et al., 2000) to 43 years (Blaauw et al., 2002). However, there are inconsistencies across studies, with some suggesting that victims are likely to be unemployed (e.g., Blaauw et al., 2002; Nicastro et al., 2000), whilst other suggest victims are more likely to be employed (e.g., Sheridan et al., 2001).

Despite the inconsistencies across studies, patterns of harassment have emerged. Reinforcing the myth that harassment is a gendered crime, females are more likely than males to become victims of harassment, and males are more likely than females to perpetrate harassment. However, males are harassed and females can perpetrate harassment. Furthermore, victims of harassment are likely to know their harassers prior to the onset of harassment, as instances of perpetrators harassing strangers are less common.

2.3 Cyber-harassment and Cyberstalking: Legal and Definitional Issues

Whilst cyber-harassment is a criminal act within the UK, there is no legislation dealing specifically with cyber-harassment. However, Basu and Jones (2007) and Ellison (1999) argue the *Protection from Harassment Act (PfHA) (1997)* is broad enough to allow for the prosecution of cyberstalkers. The Act does not describe what behaviours constitute harassment. Thus, whether the perpetrator's behaviour constitutes harassment is determined by a jury (Bocij, 2004). The Act has been criticised because of ambiguity concerning the term 'harassment' (Bocij, Griffiths & McFarlane, 2002). This means that the ability of solicitors will play a major part in whether the cyberstalker will be successfully prosecuted as they will be responsible for proving beyond a reasonable doubt that the perpetrator's behaviour constitutes harassment (Bocij, 2004). Bocij, Griffiths and McFarlane (2002) further criticise the *PfHA* because it does not allow for cyberstalkers to include groups of people or organisations and it assumes that all victims are individuals. However, this is no longer the case, as Basu and Jones (2007) highlight that the *Criminal Justice and Police Act (2001)* extends the scope of the *PfHA* by acknowledging that cyberstalking perpetrators and victims can include groups of people or organisations.

Drawing from anti-harassment legislation, definitions of cyberstalking have been proposed. For example, D'Ovidio and Doyle (2003) define cyberstalking as "the repeated use of the Internet, e-mail, or related digital electronic communication devices to annoy, alarm, or threaten a specific individual or group of individuals" (p. 10). Similarly, Bocij (2002) defines cyberstalking as:

A group of behaviours in which an individual, group of individuals or organisations, uses information and communications technology to harass

one or more individuals. Such behaviours may include, but are not limited to, the transmissions of threats and false accusations, identity theft, data theft, damage to data or equipment, computer monitoring, the solicitation of minors for sexual purposes and confrontation. (p. 4).

Both of these definitions recognise that cyberstalkers can stalk 'one or more' victims. Whitty and Carr (2006) regard Bocij's definition as inclusive and highlight four reasons why Bocij's definition is important. First, Bocij notes that a group of people and/or organisations can be the perpetrators of cyberstalking. The notion that organisations engage in cyberstalking is known as 'corporate stalking' (Bocij, 2004). A clear example of this is the case *Hitchcock vs. Woodside Literary Agency*. Resulting from a disagreement, the agency engaged in cyberstalking behaviours against Hitchcock. Such behaviours included spamming and impersonating Hitchcock online (Whitty & Carr, 2004). Second, in a deviation from the *PfHA*, Bocij provides a list of behaviours he considers to constitute cyberstalking, emphasising that the list is not exhaustive. This allows for the rapid pace at which technology evolves. Third, Bocij allows for cyberstalking to be carried out using text and multi-media messaging services on mobile telephones. Cyberstalking via mobile phone technology is rarely included in empirical research but case studies have shown that it does exist. For example, David Cruz sent up to thirty sexually explicit text messages per day to Chloe Easton when she rejected his romantic advances (Whitty & Carr, 2006). Finally, Bocij's definition includes a provision that acknowledges the use of the Internet by paedophiles to locate, 'groom' and abuse children. This latter point is a major difference between stalking and cyberstalking (Bocij, 2004). However, the motivations of paedophiles and the notion of grooming their victims may render them sufficiently distinct from the more typical cyberstalker, setting them in a category of their own. In addition, paedophiles using the Internet to groom children are not prosecuted under the *PfHA*, but under the *Sexual Offences Act 2003*. This suggests that at least legally, grooming is not regarded as an act of harassment.

A key issue regarding cyber-harassment is whether the threats made by perpetrators are credible, as perpetrators do not have to be geographically close to their victims (Burgess & Baker, 2002). However, Bocij and McFarlane (2003) argue the threats made are as legitimate as those made by offline stalkers. Sheridan and Grant (2007) found that cyberstalked victims received a similar amount of threats of physical and sexual harm compared to victims stalked offline. Other studies suggest that cyberstalkers are more likely

to threaten victims than those who engage in offline stalking (Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005). Whether these threats can be taken seriously has been questioned. However, cyberstalkers can travel to their victim's home and/or may enlist the help of other individuals who may be geographically closer to the victim. For example, Gary Dellapenta impersonated a woman whom he had become fixated on, and posted messages on the Internet claiming the woman had fantasies of being raped. The messages included the woman's contact information, address, and alarm code for her home (Ellison, 1999). Whilst these are direct threats to the victim, there are other forms of threatening behaviour that a cyberstalker can engage in. For example, Alexy et al. (2005) found that cyberstalkers are more likely to threaten suicide than offline stalkers. This type of threat may cause the victim distress. Additionally, sending computer viruses threatens the victim's hardware and software.

As the *PfHA* is a victim-defined crime, the impact of cyber-harassment on the victim is a crucial determinant of whether a crime has taken place. Bocij (2003) found that 23% of cyberstalking victims were highly distressed by their experiences. Distress was measured by rating the level of distress on a key from 0 (indicating no distress) to 10 (indicating highly distressed). This measurement is subjective and vague, and the study fails to fully address the impact of cyber-harassment on victims. However, an interesting finding suggested that Internet self-efficacy was implicated in reducing or increasing distress: individuals who had a greater knowledge and experience of communications technology were less distressed than new users of technology. Sheridan and Grant (2007) found no difference in the medical and psychological impact of cyberstalking on victims compared to stalked victims. McKenna (2007) highlights the case of Ryan Halligan, who was harassed by his peers via Instant Messenger. Halligan was teased by his peers when a girl he had been chatting to online distributed transcripts of their 'chats' to friends. Gati, Tenyi, Tury, and Wildmann (2002) present a case study of a 16 year old girl whose onset of anorexia nervosa correlated with online sexual harassment. These results suggest that the impact of cyber-harassment on victims can be severe, and their experiences and trauma should not be trivialised.

Whilst there is a need to protect victims from cyber-harassment, Basu and Jones (2007) suggest that regulating people's behaviour on the Internet may not be appropriate. They

argue that regulating people's online behaviour is virtually impossible, and attempts to do so will detrimentally change the online environment. However, Wall (1998) argues that online behaviour is already being regulated in four main ways. First, Internet users can report negative experiences to online help groups. For example, Working to Halt Online Abuse (WHOA) is an organisation aimed at helping individuals who have been harassed online. Second, the Internet is regulated by Internet Service Providers (ISPs) who are responsible for providing a safe service to their clients. According to Wall, ISPs are fearful of negative publicity and are wary of their legal liabilities to clients. Third, governments have controlled the access to information that their citizens have. In the US, there is now legislation requiring ISPs to provide 'backdoor' access to user's email addresses. Finally, state-funded public police organisations also help to regulate the Internet. Local police authorities would fall under this category.

The success of anti-harassment legislation depends on cyber-harassing crimes being reported to the authorities. However, Alexy, Burgess, Baker and Smoyak (2005) found 32% of cyberstalked victims reported their experiences. However, it is unclear who (the police or Internet service providers) participants reported it to. Bocij (2003) reported that 14% of victims reported their experiences to the police and a further 33% reported it to Internet service providers or Internet safety organisations. Finn (2004) reported that the most common reason for not reporting cyberstalking and/or cyber-harassment was because victims did not consider the problem to be serious enough to warrant police involvement (38%). Other reasons for not reporting it included participants ignoring the harassment (20%), dealing with it themselves (20%), and they did not know who to report it to (13%). Self-esteem issues and fear of secondary victimisation may be particularly relevant in cases of cyberstalking. Friends and family members of the victim may blame the victim's use of the Internet and online behaviour as the reason for their misfortune. Bocij (2004) and D'Ovidio and Doyle (2003) note that police authorities told victims to turn off their computer. This suggestion blames victims for using the Internet and may deter low self-esteem victims from seeking help and reporting the crime. If people fail to report their experiences to the authorities the extent of the problem will not be acknowledged, and adequate help and support for victims will not be provided.

2.3.1 The Nature and Extent of Cyberstalking

Several studies have aimed provide prevalence rates and describe the nature of cyber-harassment. However, at present there are no reliable prevalence rates for cyberstalking (Bocij, 2004; Sheridan & Grant, 2007) and this may be due, in part, to a lack of research investigating the issue (Bocij & McFarlane, 2002; Ogilvie, 2000a; Ogilvie, 2001b; Sheridan & Grant, 2007). Table 7 below shows the prevalence rates of various forms of cyber-harassment (including cyberstalking) found in a number of studies.

Table 7: The Prevalence of Cyber-Harassment

Author	Sample Population	Prevalence Rates
Sheridan & Grant (2007)	Self-defined (stalked) victims (n = 1051)	47.5% cyberstalked 4% stalked solely online 4.9% stalked online for min 4 weeks then stalked offline 38.6% stalked offline but included online methods
Williams & Guerra (2007)	Youths in Grades 5, 8 and 11 (n = 5632)	9.4% Total sample cyber-bullied
Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak (2005)	Students (n = 756)	3.7% Cyberstalked
Finn (2004)	Students (n = 339)	10 – 15% Cyber-harassed
Ybarra (2004)	Youths aged 10 – 17 years (n = 1489)	6.5% harassed online 3% cyberstalked
Spitzberg & Hoobler (2002)	Students (n = 235)	59% cyber-ORI 19.6% fearful

The prevalence rates range from 3% (Williams & Guerra, 2007) to 59% (Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002) and appear to be due to differing definitions of cyberstalking and methodologies employed. For example, the 59% prevalence rate found by Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002) included instances of cyber-obsessive relational intrusion (cyber-ORI) which the authors defined as “the unwanted pursuit of intimacy through the repeated invasion of a person’s sense of physical or symbolic privacy” (p. 73). This is important because Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) note that whilst cyber-ORI and cyberstalking are related, not all cases of cyber-ORI are cases of cyberstalking. However, Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002) note that 19.6% of participants were fearful of their pursuer and they conclude this may be a more valid prevalence rate for cyberstalking. In another example, Finn (2004) reported cyber-harassment rates of 10–15% but did not measure the prevalence of cyberstalking per se. Rather, participants were asked to report on online harassment, defined as “repeated messages that threatened, insulted, or harassed” (p. 474). In Finn’s study, the method of harassment was confined to email and Instant Messages, and

harassment could occur from one incident. It is clear that research reporting instances of cyberstalking include broader cyber-harassment rates. This is important to note as not all cases of cyber-harassment are cyberstalking.

The methodology employed also influences the prevalence rates found. For example, Alexy, Burgess, Baker, and Smoyak (2005) reported that cyberstalking occurred among 4% of a student sample. They asked participants to read a vignette depicting a case of cyberstalking and to report whether they would label it as such. The authors did not describe the layout of the survey. If the vignette was given to participants at the same time as they were asked about their own cyberstalking experiences, the results may have been influenced by priming effects. Notably, the vignette described a severe case of cyberstalking and participants who had been cyberstalked may have marginalised their own experiences because they did not match the scenario. In another example, the recruitment method used by Sheridan and Grant (2007) would have lead to the over-inflated prevalence rate of 48% as participants were recruited from an organisation aimed to help victims of stalking and were likely to have experienced severe stalking. It is interesting to note that only 4% of victims were stalked solely online and a further 5% were cyberstalked for at least four weeks before the stalker engaged in offline stalking. These results suggest that whilst forms of pure cyberstalking (i.e., those who are stalked solely online) are rare, the majority of cyberstalking cases arise from offline stalkers who use the internet to further their pursuit of a victim. However, as the sample consisted of self-defined victims of stalking, the researchers may not have accessed cyberstalked victims who do not know what cyberstalking is or are embarrassed to seek help. In addition to the problems in recruitment strategy, Sheridan and Grant argue the similarities between offline stalking and cyberstalking may mean that it is “unnecessary to rigidly define cyberstalking” (p. 636). These studies highlight that how researchers obtain their sample, design a study and operationally define cyberstalking has lead to inconsistent prevalence rates.

Whilst the prevalence of cyber-harassment is unclear, there is consensus that cyberstalking will increase as people incorporate technology into their lives (Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005; Bocij, 2004; Finn, 2004; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002; Wood & Wood, 2002) and Whitty and Carr (2006) propose that instances of cyberstalking will surpass incidences of offline stalking. As is noted by Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002), this may be because

increased contact (via the Internet) with others provides more opportunities for intrusion in one's life. However, research by Sheridan and Grant (2007) and Williams and Guerra (2007) indicate that instances of cyberstalking and cyber-bullying (48% and 9%, respectively) occur at a less frequent rate than their offline counterparts. This suggests that cyber-harassment is not more prevalent than offline forms of harassment, and adds to the confusion about the extent to which cyber-harassment is occurring.

Although the prevalence of cyber-harassment is unclear, it is clear that cyber-harassment occurs. This provides some justification for the need to investigate aspects of cyber-harassment and cyberstalking. Whilst it is beyond the remit of this thesis, research investigating cyber-harassment would benefit from establishing prevalence rates of cyber-harassment among the general population of Internet users. Additionally, issues of false reporting found in research investigating offline stalking (see Section 2.2.3 in this chapter for discussion) have yet to be studied in relation to cyberstalking.

To describe the nature of cyberstalking, there have been some descriptions of the behaviours perpetrators engage in. Ogilvie (2000a, 2000b) suggests there are three primary ways in which perpetrators can cyberstalk. These are by using email, using public spaces on the Internet (such as newsboards and chatrooms), and computer stalking (the manipulation of *Windows* to gain access and control over the victim's desktop). However, this view is speculative and it is important to gain a better understanding of the methods employed by perpetrators through empirical investigation.

In an attempt to empirically investigate types of cyberstalking behaviours experienced by individuals, Bocij (2003) provided 169 participants (recruited via email using snowball sampling) with a checklist of behaviours and asked them to select the ones they had experienced. The most commonly experienced behaviours included receiving threatening/abusive comments in chatrooms (48%), receiving malicious computer programs (40%), and receiving threatening/abusive emails (40%) and via Instant Messaging services (39%), attempted computer monitoring (27%) and cyber-harassment by proxy (24%). Harassment by proxy occurs when the perpetrator of cyberstalking/harassment recruits third parties to contact the victim (Bocij & McFarlane, 2003). A large percentage of the sample (28%) stated that they had experienced some other form of online harassment that they

found to be distressing. However, considering this is a large percentage of the sample, the researcher does not elaborate on what other behaviours were encountered.

Whilst these rates appear to be high, they must be treated with caution. Sheridan and Grant (2007) noted that the researchers only asked participants if they had experienced the behaviours. As this is the case, there is no way to tell if participants experienced more than one of the behaviours, and if they did experience more than one of the behaviours, there is no way to tell if the behaviours were perpetrated by the same individual. Therefore, it is impossible to know if the participants experienced cyber-harassment as defined by the *PfHA*. As noted by Bocij, the snowball sampling technique may have biased the results as those who were asked to take part may have recruited other people they knew to have experienced some of the behaviours. However, Bocij suggests that cyberstalkers engage in four main activities: issuing threats; harming the victim's reputation; causing damage to the victim's data/equipment; and computer monitoring.

Using a similar checklist method to Bocij, Jerin and Dolinsky (2001) asked females who used online dating websites to identify any harassing behaviours they experienced. The most commonly reported behaviours were receiving threatening and/or obscene email, and receiving spam (i.e., multitudes of junk email). D'Ovidio and Doyle (2003) also found that email methods were most common with 79% of cyberstalkers using email methods to harass their victims. Interestingly, 90% cyberstalkers in D'Ovidio and Doyle's study used only one method whilst targeting the victim. Minimal effort is required to threaten or harass someone via email messages and may make it an attractive method to harass another person. Emails can be used to send videos, pictures and text and the content of such can be interpreted as obscene and threatening. Cynthia Armistead's cyberstalker used emails initially to harass her before his campaign escalated (Griffiths, Rogers & Sparrow, 1998). Armistead received numerous obscene and threatening emails from Hillyard (Deirmenjian, 1999). Armistead began to receive thousands of messages from men who had seen a posting on the Internet that solicited sex and provided Armistead's contact details. Armistead relocated three times within a year, changed her mobile phone number and carried a concealed weapon. This case demonstrates the relative ease with which cyberstalkers can utilise online methods to harass.

Case studies may serve to better describe the way in which various behaviours are used by the perpetrators in their campaign to harass his/her victim. Bocij, Bocij, and McFarlane (2003) provide a case study illustrating a cyberstalking incident that began online and then moved offline. The perpetrator, described as Mr X, created a number of online identities and contacted women whom he could cyberstalk. He selected his victims on the basis of their gender, age, marital status, and geographical location, and had never met them. When the victims ignored one of his identities, he would contact them using another identity. Upon initial contact with his victims, he would send an email to them containing a Trojan virus that he would use to gain access to information about them held on their computers. As his behaviour escalated, he followed them, later describing what they were wearing, where they had been and boasted that they could not find him.

Bocij and McFarlane (2002) describe a case of cyberstalking affecting the Boehle family, and illustrates that victims do not need to use the Internet to be subjected to cyberstalking. A neighbour of the family placed the details of the family's nine year old daughter on a website, suggesting she was soliciting sex because he was irritated with the child drawing on the pavement outside his house. The family were subjected to numerous men contacting them in response to the bogus ad. This caused the family extreme distress. This example highlights that stalking-by-proxy can occur in cyberstalking cases. The ease with which cyberstalkers can recruit third parties to help them in their campaigns is one of the most apparent differences between cyberstalking and offline stalking. One cause of cyberstalking-by-proxy may be deindividuation, which Lea, Spears and deGroot (2001) define as "a state of reduced self-awareness, or even loss of self, often associated with immersion in the group or crowd" (p. 526). According to Festinger, Pepitone and Newcomb, (1952) "individuals are not seen or paid attention to as individuals" (p. 382). Group membership reduces the saliency of the self, producing feelings of anonymity. Perceived anonymity, in turn, leads to a reduction in concern of evaluation from others, and self-stereotyping occurs in accordance with group norms. In the case of cyberstalking-by-proxy, willing accomplices may perceive cyber-harassment as an acceptable form of group behaviour. However, individuals may unknowingly help perpetrators with their campaign of harassment, and deindividuation would not account for such cases.

2.3.2 Perpetrator and Victim Characteristics

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of cyber-harassment, it is necessary to develop an understanding of who engages in cyberstalking, who the victims are, and how this impacts on victims. The following section will review research describing what is known about perpetrator and victim characteristics. Despite the suggestion that cyberstalkers cannot directly physically attack or harm their victims, there is some evidence to suggest that cyberstalking has detrimental effects on victims (Bocij, 2003; Sheridan & Grant, 2007). This section will demonstrate that the impact of cyberstalking on victims highlights the necessity to determine whether people perceive cyber-harassing behaviours as illegal.

In an early attempt to describe the cyberstalker, Deirmenjian (1999) stated “the psychological profile of the cyberstalker reveals a sophisticated perpetrator. The typical cyberstalker is the emotionally disturbed loner who seeks attention and companionship in cyberspace and often becomes obsessed with someone he met in a chat room” (p. 410). However, Deirmenjian did not assess any cyberstalking perpetrator directly, nor did he have any direct contact with cyberstalked victims. Deirmenjian appears to assume that perpetrators of cyberstalking are seeking friendship. This contradicts the case of the Boehle family where the perpetrator engaged in cyberstalking as an act of revenge. The perpetrator described by Bocij, Bocij and McFarlane (2003) approached stalking methodically and had no history of mental illness. Deirmenjian’s description of the “typical cyberstalker” would not include Mr X and is unlikely to be relevant today.

The lack of empirical research available on cyberstalking perpetrators has rendered devising typologies virtually impossible. However, drawing from cyberstalked victim accounts, McFarlane and Bocij (2003) have suggested a perpetrator typology. Twenty-four participants were recruited via victim support groups and agreed to take part in a semi-structured interview. The data were coded by the researchers and an independent assessor. Findings pointed to four distinct cyberstalking subtypes; the vindictive, composed, intimate and collective. The ‘vindictive’ cyberstalker was likely to have a previous criminal record and/or mental illness. Cyberstalkers who fell into this category typically made strange and/or unrelated comments to the victims, sent intimidating messages and were likely to

cross over into offline stalking. The researchers suggest these cyberstalkers had a medium to high degree of computer literacy. Yet, the most extravagant technological behaviour was to send Trojans to the victims. The 'composed' cyberstalkers are less likely than the vindictive cyberstalker to threaten the victim but threats were also evident among this subgroup. The composed cyberstalker was also likely to engage in offline stalking behaviours, to have a possible criminal record, and a history of victimisation. The 'intimate' category was divided into three groups (consisting of ex-intimates and infatuates). Ex-intimates were likely to impersonate the victim in chatrooms or buy goods using the victim's credit card. Infatuates were likely to send intimidating communications and were likely to engage in offline stalking behaviours. Both subtypes were likely to threaten the victim if they were rejected by the victim. Finally, 'collective' cyberstalkers are suggested to have a high degree of computer literacy, allowing them to engage in spamming, mail-bombing, identity theft and information gathering behaviours. Threatening the victim and sending the victim intimidating messages were common among this group.

As McFarlane and Bocij note, the data were gathered using a small sample. Additionally, the sample was recruited from victim support groups and may represent victims who experienced severe cyberstalking. The authors highlight that the ex-intimate and infatuate subtypes resemble the offline stalking subtypes of ex-intimates and intimacy seekers as described by Mullen, Pathé, Purcell, et al. (1999). However, the composed and collective cyberstalker subtypes do not compare to any offline stalking typologies.

This typology must be treated with caution as the researchers did not assess any cyberstalkers directly. The data were gathered by interviewing victims and the researchers coded the data themselves. This may have led to interviewer bias which would reduce the reliability and validity of the research. The typology also appears to be incomplete and vague. It is not clear whether it was the researchers or the victims who assessed the perpetrator's degree of computer literacy. Perpetrators who were able to send their victims a virus were judged to have a medium to high level of computer literacy. This may not be as difficult as the researchers imply. Finally, the behaviours engaged in by some subtypes do not seem to be a comprehensive list of behaviours and the behaviours engaged in by composed subtypes are missing. This would suggest that there was not enough information collected in the study to devise a typology.

Table 8: Characteristics of Perpetrators and Victims of Cyberstalking

Author	Sample	Perpetrators	Victims
D'Ovidio & Doyle (2003)	201 cases (reported to NYPD 1996 – 2000)	80% Males 10 – 53 years old	52% Female 35% Male 8% Educational Inst. 5% Corporations
Finkelhor, Mitchell & Wolak (2000)	1501 youths (10 – 17 years)	54% Males 20% Female 26% Unknown	51% Male 48% Female

Table 8 above shows the breakdown of cyberstalking perpetrators and victims and their relationship prior to onset of harassment. D'Ovidio and Doyle (2003) reviewed 201 cases of cyberstalking that were reported to the New York Police Department between 1996 and 2000. Of those cases where a perpetrator had been apprehended, 80% were males aged between 10 and 53 years. This figure is similar to the male perpetration rates found in offline stalking. Finkelhor, Mitchell, and Wolak (2000) recruited 1,501 youths (aged 10 – 17 years) to participate in a telephone interview about their experiences of online victimisation. They found 54% of perpetrators of online harassment were male. This figure is considerably lower than the figure reported by D'Ovidio and Doyle. Notably, 26% of perpetrators were unknown. Although this study was conducted ten years ago, the figure illustrates that cyber-harassment can be perpetrated anonymously. However, if this group of perpetrators were male, the percentage of male perpetrators would resemble the figures found in offline stalking research.

Whilst some studies suggest that victims of cyberstalking tend to be younger (e.g., Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005; Finkelhor, Mitchell & Wolak, 2000), other studies have found that older individuals are more likely to be cyberstalked (e.g., Bocij, 2003). The inconsistency in these findings may be due to sampling techniques. The study by Alexy et al. (2005) recruited students and the study by Finkelhor, Mitchell and Wolak (2000) targeted youths aged between 10 and 17 years. Bocij (2003) employed snowball sampling, which may have resulted in the sample characteristics being skewed. Bocij concluded that individuals aged thirty years and above are more likely to be cyberstalked because they use the Internet more than younger individuals. However, Dutton and Helsper (2007) surveyed 2,350 British Internet users, judged to be representative of British population. They found that 69% of 25 to 44 year olds use the Internet in comparison to 78% of 18 to 24 year olds and 94% of those under 18 years. These findings contradict Bocij's assumption and suggest

that younger individuals are victims because they are more likely to use the Internet than older individuals.

The percentage of male victims of cyberstalking ranges from 35% to 51% (D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003; Finkelhor, Mitchell & Wolak, 2000, respectively). These figures are higher than those reported for offline stalking. Whilst Alexy, Burgess, Baker and Smoyak (2005) did not report descriptive statistics, they reported that males were significantly more likely than females to have been cyberstalked than stalked (although this was a moderate effect). Finn (2004) also noted that males were more likely to be victims but did not provide the relevant descriptive statistics. Cues (such as gender, age, physical attractiveness) are indicative of one's social status. A reduction in these cues leads to perceived equalisation of social status among low and high status individuals or groups. This is known as the equalisation hypothesis (Dubrovsky, Kiesler, & Sethna, 1991). According to this hypothesis, males are targeted by cyberstalkers more on the Internet than offline because their social status is diminished. Whilst the evidence suggests that males and females are almost equally targeted by cyberstalkers, it is unclear whether males (or females) are targeted by male/female perpetrators, and research is needed to investigate this issue.

Individuals who are socially isolated offline may be vulnerable to being cyberstalked. For example, Finn (2004) found that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual individuals were twice as likely to experience online harassment compared to heterosexual participants. Bocij, Bocij and McFarlane (2003) provided the case study of Mr X who specifically targeted socially isolated individuals. Sheridan and Grant (2007) found that 11% of cyberstalked victims were disabled but did not find any disabled victims of offline stalking in their sample. McKenna and Bargh (2000) note that individuals who are stigmatised offline may be more likely to use the Internet to communicate with others to feel less socially isolated. Indeed, Bocij et al. suggest that socially excluded individuals are more likely to engage in online conversations, and more reluctant to terminate online relationships. More research is needed to gain an understanding of why such groups would become the target of the cyberstalker.

Descriptions of the prior relationship between the victim and perpetrator of cyberstalking are similar to the perpetrator-victim relationship for offline stalking. However, Bocij (2003)

found that 42% of cyberstalked victims were stalked by a stranger. Bocij concluded that stranger-cyberstalking was frequent. However, Finn (2004) found that participants who reported receiving five or more unsolicited, harassing emails or instant messages were likely to be contacted by a stranger (7% and 2%, respectively) compared to acquaintances (2% and 2%, respectively) and “significant others” (7% and 1%, respectively). Whilst stranger-stalking was the largest single category, the majority of perpetrators were known to the victims. Similarly, Sheridan and Grant (2007) reported the prior victim-perpetrator relationship mirrored the prior perpetrator-victim relationship reported in offline stalking research. These findings highlight the need for future research to clarify the prior perpetrator-victim relationship for cyber-harassment in comparison to offline stalking.

2.3.3 Anonymity as an Incentive to Engage in Cyber-Harassment

The anonymous nature of cyberspace may encourage individuals to engage in cyber-harassing behaviours. The anonymity of online communications has lead to individuals becoming less inhibited, resulting in greater disclosures of personal information (i.e., the stranger-on-the-train phenomenon), and higher instances of aggression. This section explains how the anonymous nature of cyberspace produces uninhibited behaviour. Specifically, social context cues theory, social identification mode of deindividuation effects (SIDE) and the ‘online disinhibition effect’ will be described.

According to social context cues theory, the lack of social context cues available in online communications produces feelings of anonymity. In turn, feelings of anonymity lead to uninhibited behaviour. Sproull and Kiesler (1986) argue that “social context influences information exchange through perception, cognitive interpretation, and communication behaviour” (p. 1495). According to this theory, cues can be either static (i.e., people’s gender, age, or appearance), or dynamic (i.e., non-verbal cues). When individuals perceive social cues, they interpret the cues in order with cognitive schemas, and this produces emotional states. The cognitive interpretation of cues and the resulting emotional state are used to regulate one’s own behaviour. According to Sproull and Kiesler, strong social cues encourage individuals to focus on another individual. A reduction in the social context cues available produces feelings of anonymity. These feelings of anonymity lead to self-centred and unregulated behaviour, and extreme forms of behaviour result. Sproull and Kiesler

tested their theory in a workplace context. Five hundred and thirteen participants were recruited from two divisions of a business. Participants were interviewed, completed an 80-item questionnaire and a content analysis was performed on emails they received in the three days prior to the interviews. The researchers found evidence of uninhibited behaviour which supported their theory, and noted emails were self-absorbed and less personal. The theory received further support by Kiesler, Siegel and McGuire (1984), who asked participants to solve a choice-dilemma in three different conditions; face-to-face (FtF), via computer (anonymously), and via computer (non-anonymously). They found that computer-mediated groups took longer to reach a decision about the dilemma, participated more equally, and demonstrated higher levels of uninhibited behaviour than FtF groups.

Whilst social context cues theory suggests that anonymity leads to impersonal online behaviours, SIDE theory argues that interpersonal communication does not become more impersonal. Rather, self-stereotyping occurs. This occurs when one's individualism is reduced and one is perceived in accordance to stereotypical group characteristics, resulting in greater adherence to group norms (Rogers & Lea, 2005). This means that individuals justify their behaviour in accordance to their perceptions of real or imagined group behaviour. Lea, Spears, and deGroot (2001) explain that this occurs due to visual anonymity, which leads to a reduction in self-awareness. This reduction in self-awareness increases uninhibited behaviour and hostile behaviour can result.

Suler (2004) uses the 'online disinhibition effect' to describe the way in which online anonymity has led to more uninhibited behaviour. According to Suler, people compartmentalise different aspects of themselves. This means their online identity can be separated from their offline identity, allowing individuals to relinquish responsibility for their behaviour in cyberspace. Suler suggests that 'online disinhibition' can be either benign (indicative of people disclosing more personal information about themselves in online communications) or toxic (indicative of people engaging in criminal behaviour, flaming or accessing pornography). Cyberstalking is an example of toxic disinhibition (Bocij, 2004). According to Suler, five factors contribute to the 'online disinhibition effect' – anonymity, invisibility, solipsistic introjections, dissociative imagination and minimisation of status and authority. Suler argues that anonymity is one of the most influential factors leading to uninhibited behaviour and that invisibility serves to amplify this effect. Solipsistic

introjections refers to the way that individuals feel that they connect deeply with another individual online, and this perceived connection becomes entangled in fantasy role playing. Dissociative imagination refers to individuals perceive their online selves as engaging in a type of game that is not bound by the same rules and norms that apply in the offline world. By splitting their online selves from their offline self, individuals reduce feelings of responsibility for any behaviour they engage in online. Finally, Suler suggests that the absence of social cues available online leads to reduced perceptions of other people's authority. These principles when combined contribute to uninhibited online behaviour and may explain why some individuals engage in cyberstalking but would not engage in offline stalking.

Social context cues, SIDE theory, and the 'online disinhibition effect' all argue that anonymity on the Internet can lead to positive or negative uninhibited behaviour. Bocij (2004) suggests that feelings of anonymity may contribute to feelings of invulnerability. However, Lea, Spears and deGroot (2001) investigated the role of visual anonymity in attractiveness to groups. They randomly assigned 56 female students to anonymous or non-anonymous conditions to engage in a group discussion about nationality. Following the discussions, participants were asked to complete four questionnaires measuring group perceptions, group relations, individual perceptions of group prototypicality and British perceptions. Visual anonymity was found to increase evaluative concern amongst participants. This means that participants were more aware of their individual behaviour. Contrary to Bocij's assumption, the findings suggest that visual anonymity may increase feelings of vulnerability. However, Lea et al. acknowledge that other forms of anonymity (such as nominal, biographical and domiciliary) may contribute to a reduction in feelings of accountability for online behaviours. This is highlighted by research by Coffey and Woolworth (2004). Following a content analysis of web forum postings aimed at helping a community to cope with a series of robberies and assaults, the researchers found that 80% of all postings contained messages of anger and outrage. Of those who expressed negative racial views, only 25% included their email addresses. It was concluded that the majority of individuals expressed antagonistic views because they could remain completely anonymous. On the other hand, individuals may be aware of their behaviour but do not expect to be held accountable for it. In relation to cyber-harassment, Bocij argues perpetrators may feel they are above the law and can do what they want. Technological

advances allow individuals to remain anonymous online. For example, remailers allow individuals to send and receive emails with no real trace of who they are. Email addresses can be changed with ease, allowing people to change their identity. The accessibility of encryption software and software designed to delete files held on a computer beyond recovery has increased. Future research would benefit from investigating the specific forms of anonymity that make the Internet an attractive space to engage in criminal activity.

2.3.4 Perceptions of Cyberstalking

People's perceptions of cyber-harassment and cyberstalking are crucial in helping victims to cope with their experiences. One key feature of the judicial system is that perpetrators will be judged by their peers. In other words, a jury decides whether the perpetrator should have known that his/her behaviour constitutes harassment. This is known as the test of reasonableness. This test is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) note that females are more aware of privacy intrusions than males. For example, Agatston, Kowalski, and Limber (2007) recruited 150 middle and high school students to take part in focus groups to investigate their perceptions of cyber-bullying. Whilst the students' perceptions were not a reliable indication of the prevalence of cyber-bullying, female students were more likely than male students to perceive cyber-bullying as a problem. Secondly, Whitty (2007) suggests that people split online interactions from the offline world and thus, individuals may not apply legislation to online behaviours. Research conducted by Alexy, Burgess, Baker and Smoyak (2005) lends some support to Whitty's theory. The researchers investigated students' perceptions of cyberstalking. Four hundred and fourteen male and 342 female undergraduate participants were asked to read a vignette depicting a genuine case of cyberstalking and answer questions relating to the vignette. The vignette described the cyberstalking of Cynthia Armistead (see section 2:2 for a description of this case). Despite the severity of the case, only 30% of participants in the study by Alexy et al. (2005) labelled the case as cyberstalking and 7% of participants did not label it harassment. Participants were asked to report their experiences of cyberstalking. Interestingly, those who had not been cyberstalked were more likely than victims to report that they would not report the incident to the police if they were the victim depicted in the vignette. Those who had been cyberstalked were less likely than non-victims to label the vignette as stalking. However, it should be noted that 45% of the participants had attended a

course concerning interpersonal violence and attendance at this course may have influenced the findings. The authors did not report differences in labelling the vignette as cyberstalking between those who had attended the course and those who had not. This would have been an interesting variable to consider as the findings may have been influenced by priming.

These results have potentially major implications: if these crimes are not reported, there will be a failure to identify and implement adequate intervention strategies to help victims to cope with their experiences. Perpetrators will not be prosecuted for their behaviour and this will perpetuate the prevalence of cyberstalking. Second, for those perpetrators who are apprehended, the jury may find the perpetrator not guilty because they do not perceive the legislation as applying to online behaviours. Research is needed to further explore whether cyber-harassing behaviours are perceived as illegal, and assess why this may or may not be the case. The current research attempted to explore these issues.

Chapter 3: Methodological Issues and Considerations

3.1 Introduction

This chapter has three sections which consider the methodological issues pertaining to the research reported in this thesis. The chapter begins with a discussion of the methodological and philosophical issues pertaining to mixed methods research. This section includes a discussion of the methodological debates and paradigm wars relating to quantitative and qualitative approaches to conducting research, and introduces the philosophy of conducting mixed methods research. The section finishes with a rationale for the mixed methods approach of this thesis.

As the majority of research in this thesis used online research methods, the second section of this chapter focuses on internet-mediated research methods (IMR). The advantages and disadvantages of IMR are considered in terms of cost, offering incentives, sampling, data quality, attrition and missing data, the equivalence to offline methods, and self-disclosure. Consideration is given to methods of online interviewing, with specific focus on *Instant Messenger* as a research tool.

Finally, the chapter explores the ethical considerations of this research. Ethical considerations were determined by the BPS Code of Conduct and include informed consent, risk of harm, anonymity and confidentiality, debriefing, and right to withdraw. Ethical decisions made during this project were further complicated by the choice to use online methods of data collection, and particular focus is given to this.

3.2 Mixed Methods Research

3.2.1 Methodological Debates and Paradigm Wars

The methodologies and methods used by researchers are dictated by their paradigmatic orientation (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). A paradigm is a worldview encompassing beliefs and practices that guide the research process (Morgan, 2007). The two dominant paradigms within social science research are positivism and constructivism. Positivism is associated

with quantitative methodologies, whilst constructivism is associated with qualitative methods. However, the two paradigms differ on a range of philosophical and methodological issues, which has resulted in a paradigm war (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). Despite philosophical and methodological differences, the paradigms share agreement that research should be conducted rigorously, minimising potential sources of invalidity, and the need to embed theory with empirical investigation (Johnson & Onweugbuzie, 2004; Yardley & Bishop, 2008). Despite this superficial agreement, purists from the paradigms contend that it is inappropriate to mix qualitative and quantitative methodologies because of philosophical differences between the paradigms (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009).

However, recently there has been a rise in a third paradigm – mixed methods. Researchers who utilise mixed methods counter the incompatibility thesis by contending it is possible to mix qualitative and quantitative methodologies. One school of thought associated with mixed methods is pragmatism. Pragmatism postulates that research methodologies should be determined by the research questions, and not the belief systems of the researcher (Bryman, 1984). This means pragmatists do not adopt the either/or approach in determining whether qualitative or quantitative methods are used to address research questions. Rather, pragmatists adopt the ‘what works’ approach to answering research questions and argue for a more holistic study of phenomenon (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009).

3.2.2 Quantitative Approaches

Quantitative approaches to conducting research are associated with the positivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). Philosophically, positivism postulates that there is a single reality that can be objectively observed, also known as naive realism (Henwood, 2000; Michell, 2003). Positivism is concerned with empirical investigations that are value-free, as value-laden research is considered to confound empirical investigation which reduces objectivity. The possibility of causal linkages is an important tenet of positivism, as the identification of causes of phenomenon allow for prediction and control of the phenomenon under investigation (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009).

The philosophy of positivism is purposefully aligned with the physical sciences in order to gain scientific recognition for the study of social and psychological phenomena. Like the physical sciences, problems to be investigated are considered to comprise of discrete parts or units that are quantitatively measurable (Michell, 1997). For example, as length can be quantitatively measured (e.g., using inches, feet, etc.), attitudes consist of discrete parts that can be investigated using quantitative measurements. Furthermore, as phenomena consist of discrete parts that are measured quantitatively, the data gathered are analysed using statistical analysis (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009).

The quantitative research process is distinctive, and is based on the hypothetico-deductive model (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). Historically, the roots of positivism can be seen in the Socratic Method, which postulated that truth could be accessed through questioning after careful *a priori* reasoning. Thus, the hypothetico-deductive model involves the derivation of hypotheses from theory, which are empirically and rigorously tested to either support or refute the theoretical assumptions (Bryman, 1984; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Johnson & Onweugbuzie, 2004). Using the model, quantitative research aims to establish cause and effect among the phenomenon under investigation. Cause and effect are established by manipulating independent variables and examining the effect on the dependent variable. By conducting research in a similar fashion to research approaches of the natural sciences, quantitative research in the social sciences ensures research is highly replicable with high internal validity. Based on measurement theory, Michell (1997) argued the primary aim of quantitative research is to develop reliable measurement tools. This is achieved by standardising measurements that have high internal validity. By achieving reliability and internal validity, empirical studies can be replicated, allowing theory to be further refuted or substantiated. Should the null hypothesis be accepted, researchers refine the theory and devise new hypotheses that are then tested to explain the phenomenon. The knowledge accumulating from the quantitative approach is accepted as factual (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Quantitative methodologies aim to gather numerical data which can be statistically analysed. Thus, research designs include correlational studies, surveys, experiments and quasi experiments (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). By aiming to gather numerical data, quantitative studies can recruit large numbers of participants either using probability or

purposive sampling, which can then be generalised to the wider target population. It is a nomothetic method which aims to identify laws that can predict at a general or macro level.

Teddie and Tashakkori (2009) noted several widely recognised criticisms of quantitative research. By establishing cause and effect, quantitative research postulates that the effect will occur if certain pre-determined circumstances exist. However, the effect cannot be guaranteed in all cases. In this respect, quantitative research is concerned with macro predictions and cannot be specified to micro cases. Furthermore, the problem of verification exists, meaning that more than one theory can be supported through empirical investigation. Thus, multiple explanations of the existence of phenomena exist, and one theoretical position cannot be upheld as the truth. Finally, quantitative research relies on operationally defining the problem under investigation. By operationally defining the problem, researchers restrict the applicability and comparability of findings of research to other circumstances involving the problem under investigation which have differing operational definitions. Furthermore, whilst quantitative research can provide numerical valuations on attitudes and beliefs, it cannot explain individuals' meanings behind their attitudes and/or beliefs (Yardley & Bishop, 2008). These issues are apparent in quantitative research investigating offline and online harassment. For example, differing operational definitions of harassment and differing measurements have produced varied estimates of prevalence for both online and offline harassment (Sheridan & Grant, 2007). In studies measuring prevalence, quantitative measures can provide prevalence rates on behaviours operationally defined by the researchers but cannot explain what these behaviours mean to participants.

3.2.3 Qualitative Approaches

Some authors (e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009) argue qualitative approaches to research are a product of positivism, borne from the criticisms of quantitative research. Qualitative research is associated with the interpretivist (Miles & Huberman, 1994) or constructivist (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009) philosophical orientation. Whilst the philosophical basis of qualitative research varies, the underlying philosophical arguments are essentially interpretivist.

There is a polarisation of the philosophies underlying positivism and interpretivism (Bryman, 1984), and as such, interpretivism rejects many of the philosophical tenets of positivism. Epistemologically, interpretivism rejects the positivist notion that the researcher can remain objectively distant from the research participant (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009; Yardley & Bishop, 2008), and emphasises *sine qua non* (i.e., obtaining a worldview from the participant's point of view) (Bryman, 1984). Interpretivism considers all research inquiry to be value-laden, and researchers need to consider and reflect on their own values when investigating a phenomenon (King, 2000; Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). Ontologically, the interpretivist paradigm rejects the notion of a single reality in favour of the notion of multiple realities, that are constructed both at the societal and individual levels (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). The interpretivist paradigm postulates cause and effect relationships are impossible to verify, and as such should not be the focus of research in the social sciences. Finally, whilst positivism highlights the generalisability of findings, the interpretivist paradigm highlights that transferability is possible but the onus lies with the reader to decide whether transfer of the findings is relevant to their research (Kuper, Lingard & Levinson, 2008). Authors often assert that transferability is one of the greatest strengths of qualitative research, and one of the more important tenets of qualitative research (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yardley & Bishop, 2008).

Whilst quantitative research is theory-led (i.e., deductive), qualitative research is concerned with generating theory (i.e., inductive) (Bryman, 1984; Johnson & Onweugbuzie, 2004; Yardley & Bishop, 2008). To attain greater insights to phenomena, qualitative methods include participant observation and semi- or unstructured interviews (Bryman, 1984). The data collected using qualitative methods is rich and in-depth, allowing the researcher to investigate a multitude of variables that are not restricted by the researcher's imagination (Yardley & Bishop, 2008).

A further strength of qualitative research is gaining an understanding about the meanings individuals attach to social phenomena (Mason, 2006). Meaning relates to the intentions, cognitions, affect and evaluations of the participant (Maxwell, 2002). Qualitative research is committed to understanding how participants perceive or make sense of phenomena within a specific context (Yardley & Bishop, 2008). Whilst mean-making processes are

important within qualitative methodologies, Dilley (2008) notes the interview schedule may structure meaning during the interviews, and may be likely due to priming effects.

Qualitative research is considered to counter the criticisms of quantitative research by focusing on phenomenon at the micro level, understanding the meaning individuals place on social phenomenon, and by allowing for the transfer of data. However, Teddie and Tashakkori (2009) note that qualitative research is criticised on the grounds that it is unscientific. As the research process is subjective and value-laden, there are concerns that credibility issues exist (Yardley & Bishop, 2008). However, researchers are increasingly being encouraged to increase the transparency of the data collection and analytical phases, which may serve to increase the credibility of qualitative research.

3.2.4 Mixed Methods Approaches

Mixed methods approaches to research are also known as multi-methods or multi-strategy approaches (Bryman, 2006). The basic premise of mixed methods (MM) research is the methods used to investigate a phenomenon should be dictated by the research questions (Bryman, 1984; Mason, 2006; Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). Johnson and Onweugbuzie (2004) define MM as ‘the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study’ (p. 17).

The philosophical underpinnings of pragmatism and the transformative perspective are associated with MM (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). As this thesis adopts a pragmatic approach to conducting research, this discussion will focus on the pragmatic approach as the transformative perspective has been discussed by other authors (e.g., Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Epistemologically, MM researchers postulate that quantitative and qualitative methods require imagination and interpretation (Yardley & Bishop, 2008). Whilst imagination and interpretation may be associated with qualitative methods, quantitative researchers require imagination to identify variables that may explain a phenomenon. Furthermore, the identification of appropriate statistical procedures that address the research question also

requires imagination. Multi-methods research rejects the incompatibility thesis, with a major tenet being that quantitative and qualitative methods can be combined and complement each other. This is evident as Teddie and Tashakkori (2009) define pragmatism as ‘a deconstructive paradigm that debunks concepts such as “truth” and “reality” and focuses instead on “what works” as the truth’ (p. 7–8). The rejection of the incompatibility thesis, and the stance that quantitative and qualitative methods can be combined and complement each other is arguably one of the greatest strengths of MM research (Mason, 2006; Yardley & Bishop, 2008).

Teddie and Tashakkori (2009) refer to the ‘inductive-deductive research cycle’ and argue that MM research is essential to the holistic understanding of a phenomenon. Research designs can be either concurrent or sequential, with the data analysis being combined, equating to a single study. The reference to an inductive-deductive cycle suggests that qualitative research must precede quantitative research. Such a cycle appears logical with qualitative research exploring an unknown phenomenon, and quantitative research attempting to generalise the findings to a wider population. However, accepting qualitative research as preparation for, or informing quantitative research indicates the acceptance of positivism, and that qualitative research is inferior to quantitative research (Bryman, 1984).

Some authors associate MM research with triangulation (e.g., Moran-Ellis, Alexander, Cronin, et al., 2006), which allows conclusions drawn from one research method to be evaluated against the conclusions from another method (Greene & McClintock, 1985). Blaikie (1991) argues that triangulation and the mixed methods approach to research is adopted so that issues of bias and validity of one method (e.g., quantitative) can be overcome by using the other method (e.g., qualitative). The divergence of results indicates the measurements used to investigate a phenomenon are flawed. However, if different methods produce similar conclusions, the validity of the research is increased and confidence is raised in relation to the conclusions (Blaikie, 1991; Bryman, 2006). However, following a systematic review of MM studies, Bryman concluded that triangulation is often a product of conducting MM research, rather than an aim of MM research.

However, MM approaches to research have not escaped criticism, indicating MM approaches are controversial (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). Hammersley (2000) warned that pragmatic mixed methods research may discourage consideration of methodological and theoretical issues relating to qualitative and quantitative research methods. Similarly, Mason (2006) notes the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of MM approaches are not as fully developed as quantitative and qualitative approaches. Furthermore, there are few guidelines referring to the appropriateness of different MM designs or how to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches. This latter point was highlighted by Bryman's (2006) systematic review, which revealed that 27% of MM studies reviewed did not use separate research instruments. Bryman queried whether such studies equate to a MM approach. However, until the MM guidelines are more developed, researchers are free to subjective interpretation of what they consider MM approaches.

3.2.5 Rationale for Mixed Methods Approach

The studies in this thesis formed a sequential mixed-method design as described by Teddle and Tashakkori (2009). The studies can be described as:

QUAN → QUAL → QUAL → QUAL

Whilst Teddle and Tashakkori (2009) advocate the inductive-deductive research cycle, this thesis contradicts this suggestion. However, the position taken throughout this thesis is that it may not be appropriate to begin MM research with qualitative methods and progress to quantitative methods, and it is more appropriate to return to the MM philosophical position that research questions should dictate the methods. The reasons for beginning the research process with a quantitative study are two-fold. First, the methods used in this thesis were informed by the research questions. Second, cyber-harassed victims were the target population for Study 2. However, victims are not easily located as there is no central location to recruit cyber-harassed victims from. Thus, the first study facilitated sampling for the second study. Furthermore, the findings from one study provided some indication of the types of questions to be posed to participants in subsequent studies, lending to the sequential nature of the research.

Three of the four studies in this thesis were qualitatively driven, indicating a preference for qualitative methods. However, quantitative methods have dominated inquiry into cyber-harassment. Quantitative methods have sought to demonstrate the prevalence, nature and extent of cyber-harassment. Whilst such methods have been useful in quantifying cyber-harassment, a broader understanding of cyber-harassment is required. Thus, the qualitative focus of the studies in this thesis aimed to identify this gap in knowledge by expanding knowledge in the field. This will be achieved by exploring victims' and non-victims' understandings and mean-making processes relating to the issue of cyber-harassment.

3.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Internet-Mediated Research

The discussion of this chapter will now focus on issues relating to internet-mediated research (IMR) for quantitative and qualitative research. IMR presents novel benefits and challenges for research, and as the first three studies in this thesis use this approach, discussion of such methods is warranted. Following a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of IMR, the section will evaluate the online interview, with particular focus on using *Instant Messenger* as a research tool. The aim of this section is provide a clear rationale for using IMR following careful consideration of the problems associated with conducting research via the Internet.

3.3.1 Costs

It is generally accepted that the financial costs associated with IMR are less than offline research. IMR eliminates the need for costs associated with stationary, printing, distribution of a survey, and transcribing interview data (Granello & Wheaton, 2004). However, Fricker and Schonlau (2002) warn that researcher labour costs are the greatest expenditure in IMR, and are often overlooked in costing estimates. They argue if over 1,000 participants are required for a study, there will be minimal savings of IMR compared to postal surveys. Upon conducting a cost analysis of a web-survey compared to a postal survey, Raziano, Jayadevappa, Valenzuela, Weiner, and Lavizzo-Mourey (2001) found the web-survey cost 27% less to conduct. However, Schleyer and Forrest (2000) argue for a sample of less than 189, a postal survey is cost-effective, and if over 348 a web-survey is cost-effective. This suggests that for quantitative IMR there is an optimal number of

participants that make IMR cost-effective.

However, the cost-effectiveness of conducting qualitative research is also notable within IMR traditions. Chen and Hinton (1999) regard the interview method as the most expensive form of offline research. As with conducting quantitative IMR, the financial and time costs associated with recruiting participants and setting up the interviews are minimal. Arguably, one of the major advantages of conducting qualitative methods online is that data gathered is automatically saved; eliminating costs associated with transcription and associated errors (Chen & Hinton, 1999; Davis, Bolding, Hart, Sherr & Elford, 2004; Selwyn & Robson, 1998; Seymour, 2001).

Along with reduced financial costs, the research process for IMR is, in most instances, more efficient than offline methods. Granello and Wheaton (2004) note the average data collection period for offline surveys is four to six weeks, compared to two to three days for IMR. This is because sending and receiving surveys is shorter than, for example, a postal survey (Fricker & Schonlau, 2002). In addition, qualitative data is automatically transcribed, and quantitative data can be automatically transferred to statistical packages (e.g., SPSS), eliminating the need for data entry and reducing data entry errors (Kraut, Olson, Banaji, et al., 2004). However, Fricker and Schonlau (2002) argue claims about the efficiency of IMR ignore the preparation time of research materials, which is often longer than offline methods.

3.3.2 Incentives

Whilst there is consensus that incentives increase response rates in offline surveys (Church, 1993), thereby reducing non-response bias (O'Neil & Penrod, 2001), it is unclear whether incentives are beneficial or required in IMR. Incentives can alter participants' motivation, thus endangering validity (Göriz, 2006). Whilst Baron and Siepmann (2000) argue the Internet encourages altruistic behaviour, reducing the need for incentives, this view is not shared by all. Bekkers (2007), on the premise that altruistic behaviour is a socially desirable behaviour and online anonymity reduces socially desirable behaviour, hypothesised that altruistic behaviour should be decreased in IMR. To test this, she recruited 1,964 volunteers to participate in a web-based dictator study after which

participants could choose to keep a monetary incentive or give it to charity. Findings supported the hypothesis, as only 6% participants chose to give their incentive to charity. However, the study indicates a desire to retain incentives and did not investigate the relationship between incentives and response rate and retention. In a meta-analysis of web-based experiments, Göritz (2006) evaluated the impact of incentives and response rates of 32 studies, and monetary incentives on retention of 26 studies. She found that incentives increased response rates by 3% and retention by 4%. In another study, O'Neil and Penrod (2001) investigated the impact of incentives on completing a web-survey measuring attitudes towards the death penalty. They recruited 180 participants from a non-student sample and 51 students to complete the survey. The findings indicated that whilst incentives encourage response rates from non-students, no such relationship was found for the student sample.

Overall, research suggests that incentives encourage response rates and retention of participants in web-based surveys and/or experiments to a small degree. However, this trend may not apply to undergraduate student samples. Considering the research described, the decision was made not to offer incentives to the undergraduate students participating in the first three studies of this thesis.

3.3.3 Sampling

The accessibility of large samples recruited via the Internet is a major advantage of IMR (Birnbaum, 2004; Hewson, Yule, Laurent & Vogel, 2003). For example, Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava and John (2004) reported a sample of 361,703 participants who completed an online personality survey. Whilst, the timeframe for collecting the sample is unclear, the costs involved in collecting an offline sample of this size would render it unlikely.

A major concern is that online samples are not representative of the target population, meaning that findings cannot be generalised and lack validity (Hewson, Yule, Laurent & Vogel, 2003; Mathy, Kerr & Haydin, 2003). One contributory factor is the digital divide. This refers to “a difference in the take-up, or effective use of, ICTs between social groups or nations” (Liff & Shepherd, 2004: p. 1). The digital divide has been associated with gender, age, education, ethnicity, and geographical regions. For example, Granello and

Wheaton (2004) reported that Internet users are likely to consist of highly educated white males, aged 35 years or younger. More recently, Dutton and Helsper (2007) reported that Internet users consist of males, students, the highly educated, and those on a high income. Whilst they report the gender divide is narrowing, males and females use the Internet in different ways, with females less confident about their abilities in using the Internet. Additionally, Kaye and Johnson (1999) warns that the inclusivity of the Internet means that once a study is placed on the Internet, anyone who finds the study can complete it which may threaten generalisability to the target population. These studies highlight critical concerns in the representativeness of IMR.

Concerns over the representativeness of research and generalisability of findings are not restricted to IMR. In particular, psychological research has heavily relied on recruiting undergraduate students in convenience sampling (Reips, 2000). For example, Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava and John (2004) reviewed 510 studies published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* in 2002. Of the samples recruited, 85% were undergraduate students, of which 71–77% were females (experimental and correlational studies, respectively). In contrast, IMR samples have had more even ratios of male and female participants (see Buchanan, Johnson & Goldberg, 2005; Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava & John, 2004; Schwarzer, Mueller & Greenglass, 1999). Age and ethnicity have also been found to be more diverse in Internet samples than samples recruited offline (see Gosling et al., 2004; Smith & Leigh, 1997). These studies indicate that online samples can be more heterogeneous and diverse than samples traditionally used in psychological research, and may help to increase the validity of psychological research (Baron & Siepmann, 2000; Krantz & Dalal, 2000; Kraut, Olsen, Banaji, et al., 2004).

The voluntary status of participants recruited in IMR is more likely to meet ethical demands than offline methods as participants are not coerced into participation. However, this increases the danger of volunteer biases being introduced into IMR, endangering validity (Kaye & Johnson, 1999; Reips, 2000; Strickland, Moloney, Dietrich, Myerburg, Cotsonis & Johnson, 2003). Smith and Leigh (1997) warn that volunteer biases introduce systematic error, as extraneous variables (such as the participants' motivation, personality, attitudes, and situational conditions) are not known to the researcher. Whilst there is a potential source of systematic error introduced in IMR due to the voluntary status of

participants, participants do not feel coerced into participating in research as is the trend in psychological research when undergraduate students take part for course credit. In addition, participants are freer to exercise their right to withdraw. This trade-off between systematic error and ethical considerations makes the Internet an attractive medium to conduct research.

Low response rates have been associated with IMR, indicating sampling bias and threatening the validity of research (Mathy, Kerr & Haydin, 2003; Schmidt, 1997). In a meta-analysis of 49 studies reporting the use of 68 surveys, Cook, Heath and Thompson (2000) found the average response rate for postal surveys was 56% compared to 40% for web-surveys. In another study, Fricker and Schonlau (2002) noted important differences in responding in a review of studies using email and postal surveys. They found that, if given a choice, participants preferred to return postal surveys than via email with a few exceptions. In studies whereby participants preferred to respond via email, the samples were homogeneous, indicating sampling bias. It is noteworthy that the studies reviewed were in 1990s, during which time the Internet was not as accessible as it is now. Importantly, Krosnick (1999) argues that telephone surveys generally have difficulty in reaching recommended response rates of 60%, and face-to-face surveys fail to reach a 70% response rate and there is a trend of falling response rates. Kaye and Johnson (1999) suggest it is difficult to calculate response rates for IMR because there is no way to know who has seen an online survey as they are accessible to whoever finds them. Despite concerns relating to sampling bias, the accessibility of samples (discussed above) indicates that large samples can be obtained in IMR, which increases the power of studies and minimises sampling bias (Birnbaum, 2004; Hewson, Yule, Laurent & Voegl, 2003; Reips, 2000).

3.3.4 Data Quality

The quality of data gathered via IMR can be affected by various problems that do not present in offline research methods. Problems that threaten data quality need to be carefully considered and strategies put in place to cope with anticipated and unanticipated problems. Researchers face practical issues which relate to ensuring measurement tools are presented in the same format to all participants (see Kaye & Johnson, 1999), and this may

be more of a cause of concern depending on the methods employed. Data quality may also be affected by multiple submissions, attrition and missing data (Reips, 2000). Finally, consideration needs to be given to the equivalence of online to offline surveys, and the role of anonymity and self-disclosure in influencing participants' responses (Davies, 1999; Joinson, 2001b).

3.3.4.1 Practical Issues

There is general consensus that the researcher has little control over the environmental condition under which participants take part in the research (Smith & Leigh, 1997). Consequently, IMR is associated with greater variance in participants' network and computer speeds (Reips, 2000), how visual information is presented to participants (Kaye & Johnson, 1999), and participants' ability in using the Internet (Strickland, Moloney, Dietrich, et al., 2003). Such issues pose greater problems for particular methods (such as experimental, survey or interview methods). For example, Plant, Hammond and Whitehouse (2003) compared the response time of eight different mice by measuring the time between pressing a button on the mouse and the computer receiving the signal. They found large degrees of variance between each of the mice. However, such findings would have greater implications for experimental research whereby the dependent variable is response time compared to the completion of a survey that does not measure response time.

Research has also illustrated that visual information presented to participants can be affected by the quality of their computer screen in terms of pixels, luminance and flicker (Krantz, 2000). Whilst the hardware participants use is beyond the researcher's control, such a practical issue may be important if graphics are included in, or an essential element of the research. For example, researchers using an online survey may wish to include pictures or videos to motivate and encourage participation. However, the inclusion of pictures or videos may be problematic depending on the hardware participants are using and software, for example, their Internet browsers.

The presentation of online surveys to participants is an important aspect of methods used in IMR. It is important to ensure that participants see the survey in the same format as is

intended by the research, as variations in presentation may confound the research. However, researchers cannot guarantee the survey is perceived by participants as the researcher intended (Reips, 2000). One potential reason for difference to occur is that different Internet browsers may load web pages including the survey differently. Another possibility is that the browser the survey is designed on may have different capabilities that cannot be loaded by different browsers that participants may use.

One element beyond the researchers control is the environmental setting under which the participant engages in the research. For example, participants can use multiple applications on their computer (Reips, 2000). So, participants have the technological ability to complete a survey or take part in an interview whilst simultaneously browsing Internet pages, using Microsoft Office applications, listening to music, etc. The ability to use multiple applications introduces 'noise' into the research process that would not exist if participants completed offline surveys in conditions imposed by the researcher. Online surveys have been criticised because of the introduction of extraneous variables that the researcher has no control over. However, such 'noise' is also a factor in, for example, postal surveys. In postal surveys, participants receive the survey and are free to complete the survey at their desire. Therefore, participants may complete the survey whilst completing other tasks. For example, whilst watching television, listening to music, helping children with homework etc. In this respect, the online survey is not different from other survey methods. However, researchers engaging in IMR need to carefully consider and engage with the challenges posed by IMR when deciding whether to conduct research online or offline.

3.3.4.2 Multiple Submissions

IMR can be affected by multiple submissions (i.e. the same participant taking part on multiple occasions) which can threaten reliability (Reips, 2000). Schmidt (1997) suggests multiple submissions can be due to error, curiosity, or participants maliciously attempting to damage the study. Birnbaum (2004) argues that multiple submissions are rare, and are easily detected through data screening procedures. When screening data, Buchanan, Ali, Heffernan, et al. (2005) recorded participants' Internet Protocol (IP) addresses and deleted all data sets, except the first, to eliminate multiple submissions. They deleted a sizeable number (435 out of 1199) of submissions using this method. In another study, O'Neil and

Penrod (2001) found evidence of four multiple submissions from 180 submissions. However, Hewson and Charlton (2005) propose that deleting all submissions, except the first, from the same IP address may be overcautious, and recommend checking all submissions for similarities between items before deletion of the data sets. Reips (2000) warns that deletion of all submissions from the same IP address may result in the deletion of genuine data but maximises validity. Whilst the studies reported here show variation in the degree of multiple submissions, they show that multiple submissions occur in IMR, and this needs to be considered by researchers when conducting online research.

3.3.4.3 Attrition and Missing Data

Another reported threat to the validity of IMR is attrition and missing data which may be caused by the decrease in social pressure to participate fully in the study (Birnbbaum, 2004). Reips (2000) argues that IMR will be more affected by attrition than research conducted face-to-face unless responses to the items are forced (i.e. participants cannot move on in a survey unless they answer all questions). In contrast, Hewson, Yule, Laurent and Vogel (1996) argue the voluntary nature of participation often found in IMR provides greater assurances that the research will not be affected by attrition and missing data.

To test the rate of attrition and missing data, Stanton (1998) compared the data collected from an online survey (N = 50) to a database of offline survey data (N = 181). Findings indicated the online data (M = 0.86, SD = 1.88) yielded significantly less missing data than the offline data (M = 1.64, SD = 3.08). In another study, Kiesler and Sproull (1986) reported fewer missing data in an online sample compared to an offline sample. However, the amounts of missing data were only marginally less in the online sample. These results indicate that IMR may not be affected by attrition and missing values as has been cautioned against, and make the internet an attractive medium for conducting research.

3.3.4.4 The Equivalence of Online to Offline Measures

As the first study contributing to this thesis used an online five-factor personality questionnaire, the equivalence of online compared to offline measures is now considered. Assessing the equivalence of online compared to offline measures is necessary to ensure

the scales are valid and reliable. There are a growing number of studies comparing the psychometric properties of measurements that have been adapted from paper-and-pencil formats.

In an early study, Davis (1999) compared the Ruminative Responses Scale from the Response Styles Questionnaire between introductory psychology students ($N = 1012$), upper-level psychology students ($N = 118$), non-psychology students ($N = 113$), and web-based students ($N = 128$). Cronbach's alpha for the web-based sample (.82) was marginally lower for the upper-level psychology students (.88) and the non-psychology students (.88), but comparable with the introductory psychology students (.83). However, the web-based sample yielded significantly higher rumination scores than other samples, except the upper-level psychology students. This study suggest the psychometric properties of online measures are comparable to offline measures, but the study highlights differences in responding which may be a consequence of the online medium. One explanation is that participants give more candid responses and in a less socially desirable manner which will be discussed later.

The Davis' (1999) study assessed the equivalence of unidimensional scales, whilst assessments of the equivalence of multidimensional scales have yielded mixed results (Hewson & Charlton, 2005). Buchanan, Ali, Heffernan, et al. (2005) found differences in the subscales of the Prospective Memory Questionnaire, with the psychometric properties of the long term and techniques to remember subscales being comparable with the offline measure, but the short term and internally cued subscales were not. The researchers concluded that their research highlighted the need to check the psychometric properties of online measures, as they cannot be assumed to be equivalent to offline versions of the scales. In contrast, Hewson and Charlton (2005) found equivalence between the psychometric properties of online and offline versions of the Health Locus of Control Scale, but found differences in the way participants responded.

The mixed findings of equivalence for multidimensional are of concern, as the first study contributing to this thesis utilises the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) which is designed to measure the 'Big Five' personality traits. From the 2000 IPIP items, Buchanan, Johnson and Goldberg (2005) constructed and validated a 50-item scale based on Costa

and McCrae's NEO-PI-R over two studies. In the first study, 2,448 participants recruited via search engines completed the 50-item IPIP scale and a checklist of the behaviours they reported engaging in was correlated with the relevant dimensions of the IPIP scale. Factor analysis revealed the majority of items loaded on the relevant factors, but seven items cross-loaded onto other factors. However, the reliability scores for the five subscales were comparable with offline measures. In a second study aimed at reducing volunteer bias that may have affected the findings from the first study, 249 participants were recruited using an active advertisement campaign and completed a revised version of the scale used in the first study. As with the first study, the scale was found to be highly reliable. Whilst both the original and revised scales were considered to be reliable measures of the five dimensions of personality, Buchanan et al. recommend using the revised version as the scales are closer to orthogonality than the original scales.

3.3.4.5 Self-disclosure and Reduced Socially Desirable Responding

There is consensus that web-based participants respond with increased self-disclosure and less socially desirable responding compared to offline research (Buchanan, 2002; Joinson, 1999; Kiesler & Sproull, 1986; Reips, 2002; Strickland, Moloney, Dietrich, Myerberg, Cotsonis & Johnson, 2003; Wood & Griffiths, 2007). This is a major advantage of IMR which is of particular import and relevance to the research conducted as part of this thesis. In comparison to paper-and-pencil surveys, online surveys have consistently demonstrated that participants respond with greater self-disclosure and decreased social desirability (see Davis, 1999; Buchanan & Smith, 1999; Hewson & Charlton, 2005; Kiesler & Sproull, 1986). This effect is purported as a consequence of the increase in anonymity, or perceived anonymity, afforded to participants. To test the effect of anonymity on socially desirable responding, Joinson (1999) recruited 82 participants and randomly assigned the participants to an anonymous or non-anonymous condition. Within both conditions, participants completed either an online or paper-and-pencil version of measures assessing self-consciousness, self-esteem and social desirability. Joinson reported that participants who completed the measures online scored lower in social desirability, social anxiety and higher on self-esteem compared to those who completed the paper-and-pencil survey, and this effect was greater if participants were anonymous.

In another study, Joinson (2001b) conducted three experiments to examine the causes of increased disclosure in IMR. In the first study, Joinson reported increased self-disclosure among participants who took part in a dilemma task via computer-mediated communication (CMC) compared to face-to-face (FtF). To test whether this was due to participants' anonymity, he recruited 42 students to participate in a dilemma task. Participants were randomly assigned to a visually anonymous or non-anonymous condition. He reported significantly higher levels of disclosure in the visually anonymous condition which suggested anonymity plays a key role in self-disclosure via CMC. In the third study, Joinson recruited 84 students to participate in the same dilemma task but manipulated participants' public and private self-awareness. Participants were randomly assigned to private or public (high and low) self-awareness conditions. He found that disclosure was greatest when participants had high private and low public self-awareness. Joinson argued that disclosure could not occur because of deindividuation, as deindividuation requires low private and public self-awareness, but was caused by the interaction between anonymity and heightened private self-awareness.

3.4 Online Interviewing

The internet is increasingly being used by social scientists wishing to engage in qualitative methods. Arguably, the email method is the most popular tool used to conduct online interviews. Online interviews can be conducted asynchronously (e.g., using email or discussion boards) or synchronously (e.g., using Instant Messaging software), with challenges and benefits associated with each method. Many of the advantages and disadvantages of conducting online interviews have been discussed earlier in this chapter. However, online interviews present further challenges and benefits to conducting interviews via the Internet in comparison to offline. Thus, this section will consider further benefits and challenges that are specific to online interviewing to develop the rationales used in this thesis. The section will finish with a focus on conducting online interviews using Instant Messaging software, as this tool was used for research in this thesis.

3.4.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Conducting Online Interviews

Online interviewing presents researchers with novel challenges in developing their social and technical skills (Davis, Bolding, Hart, Sherr & Elford, 2004). Different tools that may be used to conduct online interviews have different features that pose a technological challenge to researchers. For example, Selwyn and Robson (1998) note the capability of email to notify the researcher when the recipient has received and/or read recruitment emails may be beneficial. This feature may be beneficial as it contributes to determining the response rates of a study. However, this feature may also contribute to a breach of participants' privacy, representing a violation of ethics.

Furthermore, researchers need to familiarise themselves with the social aspects of the Internet which can be different from how people behave offline. 'Netiquette' is a term used to describe online etiquette and provides guidelines on how individuals should behave in various online spaces. However, researchers need to be aware that behaviour deemed acceptable in one online space may not be acceptable in another online space. For example, Scheuermann and Taylor (1997) propose the use of abbreviations and emoticons should be avoided. Whilst they propose adherence to such a guideline, the use of abbreviations and emoticons are more acceptable when using *Instant Messenger* (IM). However, other guidelines exist that researchers need to be familiar with which are applicable to all online spaces. These include not using upper casing as this denotes SHOUTING, being concise, remembering there is another person at the end of your communications, being careful about using humour and sarcasm as they can be picked up incorrectly, and summarising points that you make.

Establishing rapport may be more difficult in online interviews compared to offline interviews due to the lack of face-to-face (FtF) communication. Developing rapport is an essential part of the interview process as it can encourage disclosure (Seymour, 2001), and make participants feel comfortable and safe (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In the offline interview, non-verbal cues help to provide participants with re-assurance that the researcher is genuine. However, non-verbal cues (such as body language) are not as prevalent in the online communication compared to offline, and developing rapport may take longer via text-based communication. This is confounded by the lengthy process of

the online interview. As online interviews are text-based, the length of the interview partly depends on the reading and typing ability of both the researcher and participant. The questions the researcher wishes to pose to participants may leave little time to sufficiently develop rapport. To overcome this problem, Madge and O'Connor (2002) developed rapport with participants prior to the online interview taking place. They conducted synchronous focus groups ($n = 16$) to develop understanding of how and why new parents use the internet for information and support. They allowed one hour for the interview which they felt left little time to build rapport with participants. To overcome this, they posted photographs and biographies and emailed all participants individually prior to the focus group taking place. Chen and Hilton (1999) also advocate building rapport by developing web pages that can be accessed by participants prior to an interview. However, they note that complex web pages may be difficult to be loaded by some internet browsers. The views of Madge and O'Connor, and Chen and Hinton, relate to synchronous forms of interviewing. However, during asynchronous interviews, researchers may have more time for data collection, and may be able to devote more time to rapport building strategies.

In this thesis, building rapport for the purposes of online interviewing was more important due to the topic under investigation. Chen and Hinton (1999) note participants who are suspicious of surveillance may be less likely to participate in online interviews compared to those who are not suspicious. As this research explored perceptions of cyber-harassed victims, individuals who were cyber-harassed may have been more suspicious about taking part in research via the Internet than non-victims. Therefore, time was devoted to building rapport with all participants prior to the online interviews taking place. Additionally, the researcher used the email address provided by Nottingham Trent University to contact all participants. All participants were contacted individually, which allowed participants' the opportunity to voice any concerns they had, and to ask questions about the research.

The flow of online interviews depends on whether the interview is asynchronous or synchronous. Using email, researchers may choose to send all of the questions at the beginning of the interview and ask participants to answer them at the same time. This method resembles the open-ended survey. Alternatively, the researcher may send emails with one, or a couple, of questions at a time, and wait on the response before sending the next question. Using this method, the flow of the interview will be linear, with questions

following responses before another question is asked. However, a disadvantage of the asynchronous interview is that the researcher may be unsure about when (and if) a response will be received (Busher & James, 2007).

During their online focus group research, Madge and O'Connor (2002) noted the flow of the synchronous interview was not linear. They noted that interviewees and the interviewer interrupted each other when asking or answering questions. Davis, Bolding, Hart, Sherr and Elford (2004) note the time lag between questions and responses creates ambiguity with conversational turn-taking. The resulting ambiguity is an acceptable feature of synchronous CMC. However, due to the non-linear pattern of the synchronous interview, data may appear disjointed and possibly incoherent. The researcher needs to develop the skills necessary to analyse data in this format (Chen & Hinton, 1999).

In comparison to FtF interviews, the online interview process can be lengthy as participants engage in reading questions, formulating responses, and typing the responses to send to the researcher. Davis, Bolding, Hart, Sherr and Elford (2004) recruited 128 gay men to investigate their use of the Internet to find sexual partners, and their attitudes to HIV risk. Thirty-five interviews were conducted online, with the remaining conducted FtF. The researchers noted that online interviews took, on average, twice the length of time as the FtF interviews. They attributed this to the process and time involved in reading, thinking, and typing during the interview. This illustrates the online interview can be physically demanding for participants, and requires participants' commitment to the study (Chen & Hinton, 1999).

3.4.2 Instant Messenger as tool for online interviewing

One popular version of IM software is *MSN Instant Messenger* which allows users to upload their picture, show their name, and choose to show or hide their online status. Below this is a list of the user's online contacts (friend list) which shows their friend's online status. When a friend is online, the user clicks on their friend's name and this opens a new window, which they can 'chat' with each other. Users communicate with each other by opening a chat window. The chat window has a bar along the top that allows users to share pictures or files, engage in video or voice calls, play games or other activities online,

or invite other users to the conversation. Below this bar are pictures for each user along the left-hand side. There is a text box at the bottom, in which a user types the message they want to send to whoever they are communicating with. The text box allows for changes to the font and emoticons. When users send their message it appears above the text box with the user's name beside the message. If users are waiting on a reply to their message, they can see if the other user is typing a reply as this appears above the text box.

In a nationally representative sample, Dutton and Helsper (2007) investigated how 2,350 participants use the Internet in their daily lives. *Instant Messenger* (IM) was the third most common method (after sending emails and sending attachments) used for communication. Student participants reported IM as the second most popular method of communication, using it at least on a weekly basis. This illustrates the popularity of IM among British Internet users. Yet, despite this popularity, IM has rarely been used by social scientists as a method of online interviewing.

Steiger and Goritz (2006) evaluated the usefulness of IM for conducting online interviews. Participants initially took part in an online survey enquiring about how they were likely to respond to a request via IM to participate in an interview. Sixteen percent of participants indicated they would delete the chat request, 1% said they had given false answers in an interview, and 29% admitted to pretending to be someone else in IM. Following the survey, invitations were sent to 72 IM accounts, inviting the respondents to participate in an IM interview. Thirty-two participants took part in the IM interviews and 9% terminated the interviews prematurely. During the interview process, participants were asked five demographic questions, four filler questions about their attitudes towards science, and a final question asking about their enjoyment of the interview. Steiger and Goritz recommended using IM for interviews for short studies if complex questions needed to be asked, and if a high response rate was required. Whilst Steiger and Goritz demonstrated that IM can be used for online interviews, the questions were not meaningful. Therefore, further research is needed to establish the usefulness of IM for interviewing with sensitive questions.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to the ethical guidelines set out by the British Psychological Society (2009), and the guidelines for conducting online research (Bartrall, Hagger-Johnson, Hewson, Joinson, Mackintosh & O'Dell, 2007). This section will outline the ethical considerations applicable to this thesis.

3.5.1 Informed Consent

Obtaining informed consent from participants is necessary before conducting research (Schmidt, 1997). Traditionally, informed consent has been sought by asking participants to sign a consent form but this cannot be sought from participants via the Internet. Written consent is often difficult to obtain from online participants, and researchers cannot guarantee that participants will read and understand the statements of informed consent (Kraut, Olsen, Banaji, et al., 2004). Furthermore, researchers cannot guarantee that participants are over 18 years of age, as participants may lie about their age (Hewson, Yule, Laurent & Vogel, 2003; Wood & Griffiths, 2007). However, Hewson et al. (2003) argue that participants lying about their age may be rare and easy to detect when it occurs. These issues have led to a debate concerning whether a digital signature is legally acceptable and binding (Kraut et al., 2004). In this thesis, participants recruited via the Internet were provided with background to and information about the study, and the researcher's contact details. To encourage participants to read information provided to them about this study, participants were presented with radio buttons for each statement of informed consent. Participants' responses were forced, meaning they could not progress through the informed consent without responding to essential statements relating to informed consent. The radio button method described is widely recognised as an acceptable method of gaining consent in IMR (Birnbaum, 2004).

3.5.2 Risk of Harm

It was not anticipated that participants would experience significant physical, psychological or emotional distress as a result of completing the survey or participating in online interviews. However, there was a possibility that cyber-harassed victims may have

become psychologically or emotionally distressed due to recalling negative experiences whilst participating in this research (King, 2000). To minimise this effect, participants in the first three studies were provided with the contact details for the counselling service provided by Nottingham Trent University for students. This contact information was given to participants prior to and following their participation in this research. Furthermore, participants were advised and assured that they did not have to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with.

3.5.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality

There is a small risk with all IMR that hackers may try to gain access to the data gathered, thereby threatening the security of data, and this is beyond the researcher's control (Brownlow & O'Dell, 2002; Hewson, Yule, Laurent & Vogel, 2003). To maximise confidentiality, participants should be advised that they should not provide any identifying information. If participants have to provide identifying information, this information should be kept separately from the research data (Hewson, et al., 2003; Kraut et al., 2004). All participants in this research were advised that they did not have to provide any information they felt uncomfortable providing. Participants in Study 1 were asked to provide their email address if they would like to participate in Study 2. Any email addresses were held separately from the survey data and all data were held in password protected files.

Online participants have greater visual anonymity than offline participants, as the researcher and participants never meet. However, checking for multiple submissions for the quantitative survey in Study 1 was necessary to ensure the validity of the research. To achieve this, participants' Internet Protocol (IP) addresses were recorded. However, Joinson (2006) argues that anonymity cannot be provided. If anonymity is guaranteed, the research would lose validity as data screening for multiple submissions would be impossible. However, once the data was screened for multiple submissions, the IP addresses were deleted, leaving the data complete anonymous.

3.5.4 Debriefing

It is the researcher's responsibility to ascertain whether participants are distressed because they took part in research (Hewson et al., 2003; Kraut et al., 2004). In offline research, participants have the opportunity to approach the researcher. In IMR, the researcher and participants do not meet, making a personal debriefing session impossible. All participants were presented with a debriefing page following their participation in the research. The debriefing provided participants with the researcher's contact information and the contact information for the counselling service with Nottingham Trent University.

3.5.5 Right to Withdraw

Hewson et al. (2003) advise that participants in IMR must be provided with the right to withdraw from the research at any stage of the research. Participants were able to withdraw during the study simply by closing the browser. To ensure that participants' data could be identified should they wish to withdraw after submission of their data, and remain anonymous, participants were asked to provide a word at the beginning of the study. Should participants have wished to withdraw after submission of their data, they were asked to quote the word they chose prior to taking part in the survey or at the beginning of their interview.

Chapter 4: Perceptions and Experiences of Cyber-Harassing Behaviours

4.1 Introduction

Globally, there is no single piece of legislation to prosecute cyber-harassment. However, many countries have cyber-harassment legislation, or legislation relating to offline harassment that can be used to prosecute cyber-harassment. Perpetrators are prosecuted in the country they reside. However, countries differ in how they define harassment, and intent and threat requirements. This research will focus on the UK anti-harassment legislation: the *Protection from Harassment Act (PfHA)* (1997).

According to the *PfHA*, ‘a person must not pursue a course of conduct – a) which amounts to harassment of another, and b) which he knows or ought to know amounts to harassment of another’(s.1). Section 4 allows for the prosecution of more serious offences (i.e. stalking), and stipulates that ‘a person whose conduct causes another to fear, on at least two occasions, that violence will be used against him is guilty of an offence’ (s.4). The Act acknowledges that conduct ‘includes causing the person alarm or distress’. As the Act does not define harassment, it is broad enough to include cyber-harassment. Considering the focus of this research on the perceived criminality of cyber-harassment, the operational definition of cyber-harassment is in accordance with the Act.

Research investigating offline harassment suggests that individuals identify harassment in line with anti-harassment legislation. For example, Sheridan and Davies (2001c) assigned 88 undergraduate students to one of four groups. Each group was asked to read 20 vignettes depicting intrusive behaviour. Three groups were asked to rate the extent to which the vignettes depicted stalking in accordance with the *PfHA*, the *USA Model Stalking Code*, or the *South Australian Criminal Law Consolidation Act*. The final group was asked to rate the extent to which the vignettes met their opinions of stalking. The findings indicated that individuals were able to interpret anti-harassment legislation when making judgements of criminality for the transcripts. This was particularly evident among the group who interpreted the *PfHA*. Furthermore, when participants were not provided with anti-harassment legislation, their perceptions of stalking were closely aligned with the *PfHA*. This study suggests that jurors will be able to apply anti-harassment legislation to

harassment cases. However, Sheridan and Davies' study reflects a comprehension task that may not apply in cases whereby the perpetrators behaviour is ambiguous. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the findings from this study will translate to perceptions of cyber-harassment.

Evidence suggests that people may not perceive online behaviours as having offline consequences. According to Suler (2004), online visual anonymity reduces feelings of responsibility for behaviours people engage in online. If this is the case, people may not perceive online behaviours as facing offline consequences. Whitty (2007) agrees that people split their online behaviour from offline consequences. As such, people may not apply anti-harassment legislation to cyber-harassment. Research conducted by Alexy, Burgess, Baker and Smoyak (2005) lends support to this theory. Three hundred and forty-two participants read a vignette depicting a genuine case of cyberstalking. Despite the seriousness of the case, only 30% labelled the case as cyberstalking, and 7% did not view it as harassment. For this study, the null hypothesis is expected: individuals will not perceive cyber-harassing behaviours as criminal.

Gender may also play a role in whether people perceive cyber-harassment as criminal. Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) suggest that females are more aware of privacy intrusions than males. Agatston, Kowalski, and Limber (2007) recruited 150 students to take part in focus groups that investigated their perceptions of cyber-bullying. They found that females were more likely than males to perceive cyber-bullying as problematic. In addition, Alexy, Burgess, Baker and Smoyak (2005) reported that females were more likely than males to report stronger feelings and reactions after reading a vignette depicting a genuine, severe case of cyberstalking. Using an Australian sample, Whitty and Carr (2003) found that women were more likely than men to think that offensive material should be banned in the workplace, and disagreed more strongly than men that employees should be allowed to access sexual material on the Internet. The research noted here indicates women show more sensitivity to harassment than males. Thus, it is expected that females will be more likely than males to perceive cyber-harassing behaviours as criminal. Also, females who report experiencing cyber-harassment are predicted to report being more upset than males.

The prevalence of cyber-harassment is unclear, with rates ranging from 3% (Williams & Guerra, 2007) to 59% (Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002) from samples from the UK and USA.

The range in prevalence rates is due to differing operational differences used by researchers, differing sampling techniques and methodologies used. Despite the unreliable prevalence rates, there is consensus that cyber-harassment will increase as people incorporate technology in their everyday lives, and may surpass instances of offline harassment (Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005; Bocij, 2004; Finn, 2004; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002; Whitty & Carr, 2006; Wood & Wood, 2002). This is important when considering that offline stalking affects 12% of the adult population within UK (Budd & Mattinson, 2000), and provides justification for research in this field.

Research has indicated that students represent a group vulnerable to offline harassment (e.g., Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Fremouw, Westrup and Pennypacker, 1997), and cyber-harassment (e.g., Finkelhor, Mitchell & Wolak, 2000; Finn, 2004; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). Morewitz (2000) suggests that students represent a group who may have more free time to engage in harassment than those employed in full-time jobs, and perpetrators of harassment may be more likely to target individuals who are of similar age. Whilst the trend in psychological research to recruit student samples may have biased these findings, the current study will recruit undergraduate students.

In parallel with offline harassment, females are more likely than males to experience cyber-harassment. In a representative sample in USA, Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) found 8% of women and 2% of men had experienced offline harassment. Budd and Mattinson (2000) found similar results in the UK, with 16% of females and 7% experiencing offline harassment. Whilst it is recognised that males are more likely to report experiencing cyber-harassment than offline harassment, females are more likely to experience cyber-harassment than males (e.g., Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005; Bocij, 2003; D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003; Finkelhor, Mitchell & Wolak, 2000; Sheridan & Grant, 2007). Thus, it is expected that females will be more likely to experience cyber-harassing behaviours than males in this study.

Despite cyber-harassment occurring in a virtual world, it can impact victims psychologically to the same extent as offline harassment. In a sample of 1,051 self-defined stalking victims, Sheridan and Grant (2007) found that 48% had been cyberstalked. Logistics regression revealed no significant differences in the psychological impact of

cyberstalking compared to offline stalking. The psychological variables considered included fear, anxiety, irritation, anger, suicidal ideation, distrust, confusion, self harm, suicide attempts, depression, sleep disturbances, loss of or increased appetite, weight changes, headaches, aggression, and paranoia. In addition, Bocij (2003) found that 23% of victims in his sample reported being highly distressed by cyber-harassment. Such findings are particularly relevant to the *PfHA* as it is a victim-defined crime: it is the impact on the victim that determines whether a crime has taken place.

Considering the *PfHA* allows for the prosecution of cyber-harassment, research suggests that few victims report their experiences to the police (Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005; Bocij, 2003). Failure to report such instances will lead to a failure in recognising the extent of cyber-harassment, and may help to perpetuate instances of cyber-harassment. Finn (2004) noted that cyber-harassed victims thought their experience was not serious enough to warrant police intervention. Whilst there is evidence to suggest victims do not report their experiences to the police, there is a dearth of research investigating perceived social support in victims of cyber-harassment. According to Yap and Devilly (2004), social support has a buffering effect from stressful situations, and has a positive effect on well being. However, Kenney (2002) suggests that victims of crime fear stigmatisation by others, which is a form of secondary victimisation. He explains that victims of crime suffer reduced self-esteem as a consequence of being a crime victim. Stigmatisation and others' negative evaluations of their lifestyle further threatens victims' self-esteem. This may be particularly relevant to cyber-harassed victims as their experiences occur in cyberspace. Victims may fear that others will negatively judge them for their choices in using the Internet and for the impact 'virtual behaviours' have on them. Consequently, they may not feel able to talk about their experiences. This study will examine perceived social support by asking participants to imagine who they would tell if they experienced cyber-harassing behaviours. It is predicted that males will be less likely than females to talk to others about their experiences of cyber-harassment.

4.1.1 The Role of Personality

It is widely accepted that personality influences a wide range of behaviour (Swickert, Hittner, Harris & Herring, 2002). Whilst associations between personality and behaviour

are not limited to negative experiences, research suggests personality influences perceptions of, and reactions to interpersonal conflict (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995), how individuals use the Internet (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel & Fox, 2002), and perpetration and victimisation of intimate partner aggression (Hines & Saudino, 2008). Furthermore, evidence suggests that personality traits are stable over the lifespan (Conley, 1985), suggesting that the influence of personality on behaviour is consistent. Personality may account for individual differences in the perceptions and experiences of cyber-harassment. This study will investigate the relationship between the 'Big Five' personality characteristics, Internet self-efficacy and individuals' perceptions and experiences of cyber-harassment.

4.1.1.1 The 'Big Five'

There is little research investigating the relationship between the 'Big Five' and sensitivity to harassment. Therefore, to inform this research, consideration will be given to research investigating interpersonal conflict. Research investigating the relationship between personality and interpersonal conflict may provide some insight into how people react to threatening behaviour. Evidence suggests that introverts are more likely to over-react to perceived threat than extraverts (Crow, Hartman, Hammond & Fok, 1995), experience conflict (Bono, Boles, Judge & Lauver, 2002; Dijkstra, van Dierendonck, Evers & DeDreu, 2005) and to be victims of workplace bullying (Coyne, Seigne & Randall, 2000; Glaso, L, Matthiesen, Nielsen & Einarsen, 2007). Of particular relevance to this study, Clark, Boccaccini, Caillouet and Chaplin (2007) investigated the relationship between jury members' personality characteristics and the outcomes of criminal and civil cases. They recruited 764 jurors who completed a measure of personality, and gathered data on case outcomes. They found that extraverts were more likely to render 'not guilty' verdicts in criminal cases than introverts. Whilst the effect size was large (.63), the findings related specifically to criminal cases and not civil cases. Theoretically, introverted individuals are shy, withdrawn, submissive, and feel inferior to others (McCrae & Costa, 1985, 1987). Feelings of inferiority may produce hyper-sensitivity to conflict in introverted individuals, and they may not be confident in their judgements about criminal crimes.

According to Graziano, Jensen-Campbell and Hair (1996), agreeable individuals have learned to control negative affect and anger better than low-agreeable individuals. Highly agreeable individuals are motivated to maintain positive interpersonal relationships, and their ability to control negative affect means they are unlikely to perceive others' behaviour as threatening. In contrast, low-agreeable individuals are antagonistic, mistrustful, sceptical and unco-operative (McCrae & Costa, 1985; 1987). Considering the motivations of highly agreeable individuals, it is not surprising that negative associations have been found between agreeableness and experiencing interpersonal conflict. For example, Dijkstra, van Dierendonck, Evers and DeDreu (2005) found agreeableness was negatively associated with experiencing conflict at work among nurses. Similarly, Bono, Boles, Judge and Lauver (2002) reported that highly agreeable undergraduates were less likely to experience conflict than their low-agreeable counterparts. Whilst the effect sizes for both studies were low ($r = -.27$, $r = -.22$, respectively), the trend supports the theory that agreeableness is negatively associated with experiencing interpersonal conflict. Highly agreeable individuals may not perceive a perpetrator's behaviour as harassing because they are motivated to maintain positive interpersonal relations.

According to McCrae and Costa (1985, 1987), neurotic individuals worry, are insecure, self-conscious, anxious, angry, mistrustful and likely to suffer from depression. In a dyadic study, Bono, Boles, Judge and Lauver (2005) reported that neurotic roommates were more likely to report experiencing conflict with their roommates. Interestingly, the roommates of neurotic individuals did not perceive the conflict reported by their neurotic roommates. These results suggest that neurotic individuals perceive conflict even when conflict may not have arisen. These results must be treated with caution as the researchers did not report the personality characteristics of the roommates of neurotic participants. In another study, Gunthert, Cohen and Armeli (1999) asked 197 students to complete personality measures and to keep a diary detailing stressful encounters for a two-week period. Neurotic individuals experienced more interpersonal conflict and reported increased levels of negative affect compared to non-neurotic individuals. They explained that neurotic individuals may misinterpret encounters as negative or may have negative recall bias. However, taken together, these findings indicate that neurotic individuals are more likely to experience conflict.

There is less theoretical and empirical work associated with interpersonal conflict and conscientiousness and openness to experience. Theoretically, these personality characteristics may be applicable to this research, despite there being less empirical work to substantiate this decision. According to McCrae and Costa (1985, 1987), conscientious individuals are dutiful and have high moral codes. This high sense of morality may dispose the conscientious individual to perceive cyber-harassing behaviours as criminal. In addition, Bono, Boles, Judge and Lauver (2002) argue that individuals who score high on openness to experience tend to be argumentative, and this may provoke conflict with others.

4.1.1.2 Internet self-efficacy

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy influences individuals' perceptions of threatening situations. Individuals may not perceive a situation as threatening if they believe that they have control over the situation (Ozer & Bandura, 1990). In contrast, if individuals believe that they have little or no control over a situation, they will be more distressed by threatening situations. Internet self-efficacy refers to the belief individuals have in their ability to use and navigate the Internet, and is strongly associated with prior Internet experience (Easton & LaRose, 2000). According to self-efficacy theory, individuals high in Internet self-efficacy will feel more in control over online interactions, and will be more confident in their ability to cope with experiences of cyber-harassment. Whilst Bocij (2003) did not measure Internet self-efficacy, he found that novice Internet users were more likely to be distressed by cyber-harassment than veterans. This might implicate Internet self-efficacy as Internet experience is associated with prior Internet experience (Easton & LaRose, 2000).

In summary, this study will determine the types of cyber-harassing behaviours that students perceive as criminal, and to assess whether the 'Big Five' personality characteristics, and Internet self-efficacy influence their perceptions. The study also aims to identify the types of cyber-harassing behaviours undergraduate students' experience, and to assess whether the 'Big Five' personality characteristics, and Internet self-efficacy predict the behaviours they report experiencing. Finally, the study aims to identify the support networks students think they would avail of, if they experienced cyber-harassment.

Given previous empirical and theoretical work, it is expected that perceiving cyber-harassment as criminal, and experiencing cyber-harassment will be negatively associated with agreeableness, and positively associated with neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. It is expected that extraverts will be more likely than introverts to experience cyber-harassment but less likely to perceive it as criminal. Finally, it is predicted that Internet self-efficacy will be negatively associated with experiences and perceived criminality of cyber-harassment.

4.2 Method

4.2.1 Participants

Undergraduate students were recruited from Nottingham Trent University between December 2008 and February 2009. Four hundred and forty-three students responded to an email inviting their participation in an online survey. The survey was designed to measure their perceptions and experiences of cyber-harassing behaviours. Following data screening (see section 4.2.4), 320 responses were retained for data analysis. Of these responses, 114 (35.7%) were male, and 205 (64.3%) were female. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 51 years, with a mean of 21.02 (SD = 4.58). Two-hundred and seventy-seven (86.6%) were heterosexual, 9 (2.8%) were homosexual, 23 (7.2%) were bisexual, and 11 (3.4%) preferred not to provide their sexual orientation. When asked about their relationship status, 173 (54.2%) said they were single, 113 (35.4%) had a boyfriend or girlfriend, 21 (6.6%) were cohabiting, and 12 (3.8%) were married.

4.2.2 Measures

An online survey was designed using an online survey designer (www.surveymonkey.com) as there were no existing measures available to assess individuals' perceptions and experiences of cyber-harassment. The survey items drew from pre-existing research which employed quantitative surveys to measure the types of behaviours cyberstalkers engage in (see Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005; Bocij, 2003; D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003; Jerin & Dolinsky, 2001; Sheridan & Grant, 2007) and case studies (see Bocij, 2003; Bocij & McFarlane, 2002; Ellison, 1999; Griffiths, Rogers & Sparrow, 1998). Ten final year

psychology undergraduate students and 22 postgraduate students took part in a pilot of the survey and were asked to give feedback.

Major issues arising from the pilot included the length of the survey, the structure and wording of some items. To reduce the length of the survey, the following changes were made:

- Two demographic questions (asking participants to state their highest level of academic achievement and whether they owned a mobile phone) were deleted as they were considered redundant as undergraduate students would be recruited to complete the survey, and all pilot participants owned a mobile phone.
- The Internet personality scale used in the pilot was modified by using the revised version, rather than the full version.

To improve readability and clarity of the survey, some of the items relating to the perceived criminality and experiences of 18 online behaviours were re-structured and re-worded. The changes made include the following:

- Initially, participants were asked whether they had experienced each of the 18 behaviours and to report the degree to which they were upset for each of the behaviours. This led to a lot of missing data and was thought to be too demanding on participants. This was changed to two separate items: one item asked if they had experienced each of the behaviours and one item asking to rate how upset they were by their experience(s) with a 'not applicable' option.
- When asked who participants imagined they would report the behaviours to if they experienced them, pilot participants were only provided with one response. Feedback from the pilot highlighted that people may choose to tell more than one person. Consequently, participants were given the option to 'tick all that apply', allowing them to choose as many responses as they saw fit.
- Two of the pilot participants volunteered to participate in an online interview but failed to give their contact details. This item was re-phrased to improve the clarity of what was expected from participants if they wished to volunteer for a further study.

Following the pilot, the measures used in the study included the following:

Demographics: Participants were asked to confirm they lived in England or Wales, to provide their age, gender, sexual orientation, and relationship status.

International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) Five Factor Personality Inventory: Buchanan, Johnson, and Goldberg's (2005) revised version of the IPIP was used in this study. The 41-item scale is designed to measure five personality dimensions: extraversion (9-item), neuroticism (8-item), agreeableness (7-item), openness to experience (7-item), and conscientiousness (10-item). Participants were required to read statements relating to personality, and rate on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 'Very Inaccurate' to 'Very Accurate') the extent to which the statements matched how the participants perceived themselves. Reliability analyses indicated Cronbach's α for this study closely resemble the α values reported by Buchanan et al. (2005), indicating the subscales are internally consistent: extraversion (.86 and .85, respectively), neuroticism (.83 and .86, respectively), conscientiousness (.85 and .84, respectively), agreeableness (.77 and .77, respectively), and openness (.71 and .76, respectively).

Internet Self-Efficacy Scale: Eastin and LaRose's (2000) Internet self-efficacy scale was used in this study. Participants were required to read eight statements and indicate on a 7-point Likert scale (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree') the extent to which they agreed with the statements. Cronbach's α (.92) demonstrated high internal consistency.

Cyber-harassment Items: Participants were asked to read 18 online behaviours and answer four questions. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they thought each of the behaviours were criminal on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 'not at all criminal' to 'definitely criminal'), and to indicate whether they had experienced the behaviours on a dichotomous scale. All points on the Likert scale were labelled to increase validity and reliability (Krosnick, 1999). Participants were asked to indicate how upset they were if they experienced any of the behaviours (using a scale ranging from '0 – not at all upset' to '10 – extremely upset'), and whether they thought the same person carried out the behaviours. Finally, participants were asked who they imagined they would report their

experience to (family, friends, Internet service provider/mobile phone company, Internet moderator, police, doctor, university, no-one, don't know, and other) if they experienced each of the behaviours. Participants were asked to suggest who they would report the experience to if they selected the 'other' response. For all items in this section, participants were provided with the option 'prefer not to say' (Please see Appendix 2 for a copy of the survey).

4.2.3 Procedure

Undergraduate students attending Nottingham Trent University responded to an email inviting their participation in an online survey. The invitation email explained the survey was designed to measure their perceptions and experiences of online behaviours (please see Appendix 1 for a copy of the recruitment email). The invitation email included a URL link to the survey. Upon clicking the link, participants were presented with the background information to the study, and the researcher's contact details. To encourage participants to read the background information and the consent declaration, radio buttons were used for each consent statement. The radio button method is recognised as an acceptable method of gaining consent in Internet-mediated research (Birnbaum, 2004). *SurveyMonkey* provides the option to 'force' respondents to answer questions. This means they cannot move on to the next part of the survey until they have answered items that the researcher requires. This 'forced-response' was used to ensure participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. When participants responded to the consent, they were asked to provide a code word that they could use if they wished to withdraw from the study; they then complete the survey (as described above). Apart from the consent items, no other items forced participants to respond before continuing with the survey to ensure participants' voluntary status (for a full discussion of ethical considerations, please see chapter 3, 'ethical considerations'). When the data collection period ended, the responses were downloaded, fully anonymised, and transferred to SPSS for data analysis.

4.2.4 Data Screening

Although data screening is a laborious process, it is necessary to ensure the final data set is not influenced by multiple responses. According to Reips (2000), one accepted method of

data screening is to check the Internet Protocol (IP) addresses of the submissions to check if more than one response has been sent by the same IP address. Reips suggests that if the same IP address appears more than once, all data sets should be deleted apart from the first submission. However, the current study recruited participants from Nottingham Trent University. More than one student may have used the same university computer to complete the survey. Thus, it would not be surprising to find the same IP address for more than one data set.

Following Reips (2000) recommendations, the first step of data screening was to check for duplicate IP addresses. The date and time of all responses originating from the same IP address were then checked. Responses that were submitted in quick succession were deleted, with the first response being retained. This procedure did not account for all submissions originating from the same IP address. Thus, the next step of data screening involved checking submissions from the same IP address for similarities in the responses to items within the survey. Any data deemed similar (with the exception of a few items) were deleted, with the first response being retained. Following this, the data was screened using the code words participants provided at the beginning of the survey. Data sets that used the same code word(s) were checked for similarities within the data. Again, the later submissions were deleted with the first submission being retained. Finally, the data sets were checked to see what participants answered. If participants did not complete the majority of items relating to their perceptions and experiences of the described online behaviours, their responses were deleted. This method of data screening may have been overly cautious, and may have resulted in genuine data sets being deleted. However, it was necessary to ensure the validity of the research.

Table 9: Justification for deleting data sets

Reasons for deletion	Number of cases deleted
Multiple submissions of identical data sets	9
Participant declined ethics	9
Participant complete informed consent only	17
Participant completed informed consent and demographics only	45
Participant completed informed consent, demographics, personality, and Internet self-efficacy items only	43

Initially, 443 participants responded to the invitation to take part in the survey. The table above shows that a total of 123 data sets were deleted following the screening process. The majority of cases were deleted due to participants dropping out from the study, and not

from multiple submissions or mischievous responding. This supports Birnbaum's (2004) claim that multiple submissions are rare. Following data screening procedures, a total of 320 responses were retained for data analysis.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Perceived Criminality of Cyber-Harassing Behaviours

4.3.1.1 Descriptive Statistics

Participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale, the extent to which they thought 18 online behaviours were criminal. Table 10 shows descriptive statistics for each item on the survey. Sending malicious software to access another person's information was considered to be the most criminal behaviour, followed by sending malicious software to damage another person's software or hardware. The associated standard deviations indicate high agreement among participants in these judgements. Posting someone's contact information in a way that solicited sex, sending abusive/threatening messages via mobile phone, and sending abusive/threatening messages via the Internet were also rated as criminal. Telling someone information about their offline life that he/she did not disclose, and changing online identities/screen names to contact someone who had blocked their previous contact attempts were rated least criminal.

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions of Criminality of Cyber-harassing Behaviours

Item:	N	M	SD
14) Sending another person malicious software that can be used to access information on their computer	319	4.73	0.66
13) Sending another person malicious software that can damage their software and hardware	317	4.58	0.87
4) Sending numerous unsolicited text and multimedia messages to someone's mobile phone that are abusive and threatening	319	4.46	.86
8) Posting another person's contact information on the Internet in a way that is soliciting sex	319	4.36	1.07
2) Sending numerous unsolicited messages over a period of time via email, instant messenger, chat rooms, or Internet discussion boards that are abusive and threatening	320	4.32	.95
9) Posting sexually explicit pictures on the Internet that have been changed to resemble another person	319	3.9	1.29
3) Sending numerous unsolicited text and multimedia messages to someone's mobile phone that are sexually explicit	320	3.77	1.22
1) Sending numerous unsolicited messages over a period of			

time via email, instant messenger, chat rooms, or Internet discussion boards that are sexually explicit or obscene	319	3.66	1.22
18) Spamming another person's email in an attempt to disrupt or disable their email	319	3.61	1.32
12) Encouraging other Internet users to be abusive or threatening to another person	319	3.61	1.32
7) Posting false information on the Internet about another person	319	3.59	1.41
6) Sending another person's friends, family, or work colleagues improper messages to their mobile phone to embarrass that person or damage their reputation	320	3.43	1.33
15) Telling someone in an online 'chat' they followed them	319	3.39	1.33
17) Subscribing another person to online services that they did not want	319	3.35	1.43
16) Using an identity/screen name similar to another person and contacting their friends to destroy their reputation	318	3.35	1.36
5) Sending another person's friends, family or work colleagues messages via email to embarrass that person or damage their reputation	318	3.34	1.38
10) Changing online identities/screen names to contact another person who has blocked their online contacts	319	2.74	1.42
11) Telling someone information about the other person's offline life that he/she did not disclose	319	2.71	1.32

4.3.1.2 Dimensions of perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours

Principal axis factoring was used to identify the key dimensions underlying the perceived criminality of 18 online behaviours. The total sample consisted of 320 participants (missing values, excluded pairwise from the analysis = 10), giving a sample of 310. Eighteen items were subjected to factor analysis, with direct oblimin rotation. Direct oblimin was used because it was hypothesised that the underlying dimensions would be inter-related.

Prior to performing factor analysis, the suitability of the data was assessed. Table 12 shows the correlation coefficients between each of variables included in the factor analysis. The correlations revealed a high correlation between Items 5 and 6, suggesting a potential problem of multicollinearity in the data. The determinant (.0000684) was above the threshold of .00001 (Field, 2005), indicating singularity was not a problem. Including both Items 5 and 6 in the factor analysis resulted in a fourth factor which included only these items. In conjunction with this, the determinant was very close to the cut-off threshold. The inclusion of both items is noted in the correlation coefficients (Table 12). Tabachnick and Fidell (1996) recommend that when two items show a correlation coefficient greater than .9, the analysis should be repeated deleting one of the two items. When repeated with the

exclusion of either Items 5 or 6, the determinant reduced below the threshold. However, the fourth factor remained but comprised of the one item left in the analysis. Consequently, both items were deleted from further analyses. When Items 5 and 6 were excluded, the determinant increased to .001, indicating singularity was not a problem in the data. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (.86) demonstrated the adequacy of the sample size, and Bartlett's test of sphericity reached significance $\chi^2 = 2172.5$; $df = 120$; $p < .001$, demonstrating the factorability of the correlation matrix.

Inspection of the Scree plot (Figure 1) and Eigenvalues indicated three factors underlying perceived criminality of 16 behaviours. Accumulatively, the factors explained 49.2% of the variance, with Factor 1 explaining 34.8%, Factor 2 explaining 8.4%, and Factor 3 explaining 6%.

Figure 1: Scree Plot indicating the number of factors found for the behaviours perceived as criminal

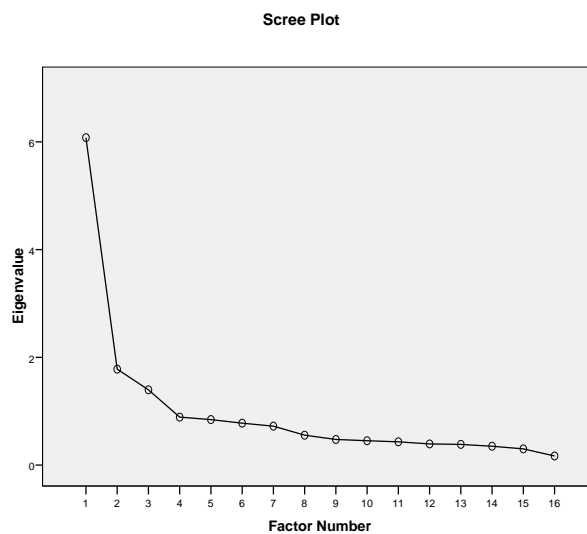


Table 11 shows the items that loaded onto each of the three factors, which emerged in seven iterations. Item 18 cross-loaded on factors 1 and 3, with higher loadings on Factor 1. Items 8 and 12 cross-loaded on factors 1 and 2, with Item 8 having a higher loading on Factor 2 and Item 12 loading higher on Factor 1.

Cronbach's α was checked for the reliability of all factors, with cross-loading factors initially retained on all the factors they loaded on. Cronbach's α for Factor 1 was reduced if

Item 18 was deleted but increased if it was deleted from Factor 3. Cronbach's α reduced for Factor 1 and remained the same for Factor 2 if Item 12 was deleted from the scale. Consequently, Items 18 and 12 were retained on Factor 1 and deleted from Factors 3 and 2, respectively. Cronbach's α reduced if Item 8 was removed from factors 1 and 2. However, as Item 8 loaded higher on Factor 2, it was retained on this factor and deleted from Factor 1. Following these changes, all three factors were internally consistent, with Cronbach's α values of .85 for Factor 1, .83 for Factor 2, and .76 for Factor 3.

Table 11: Pattern Matrix showing the Loadings of Items on each of the Factors

Item:	Factor		
	<i>Deception/ Disclosure M = 3.36 (SD = .9)</i>	<i>Harassing Messages M = 4.11 (SD = .8)</i>	<i>Malicious Software M = 4.65 (SD = .7)</i>
10. Changing online identities/screen names to contact another person who has blocked their online contacts	.75	-.01	-.14
11. Telling someone information about the other person's life that he/she did not disclose	.75	-.01	-.16
16. Using an identity/screen name similar to another person and contacting their friends to destroy their reputation	.66	-.01	.18
17. Subscribing another person to online services that they did not want	.57	.12	.17
9. Posting sexually explicit pictures on the Internet that have been changed to resemble another person	.54	-.17	.03
18. Spamming another person's email in an attempt to disrupt or disable their email	.45	.09	.38
7. Posting false information on the Internet about another person	.42	-.23	.16
15. Telling someone in an online 'chat' that they had followed them offline	.38	-.17	.02
12. Encouraging other Internet users to be abusive or threatening to another person	.36	-.32	.12
2. Sending numerous unsolicited messages via email, instant messenger, chat rooms or Internet discussion boards that are abusive or threatening	-.09	-.84	.05
4. Sending numerous unsolicited text and multi-media messages to someone's mobile phone that are abusive and threatening	-.07	-.76	.18
1. Sending numerous unsolicited messages via email, instant messenger, chat rooms or Internet discussion boards that are sexually explicit or obscene	.09	-.72	-.12
3. Sending numerous unsolicited text and multi-media messages to someone's mobile phone that are sexually explicit or obscene	.11	-.64	-.01
8. Posting another person's contact information on the Internet in a way that is soliciting sex	.32	-.36	.18
13. Sending another person malicious software that can damage their software and hardware	.05	-.03	.78
14. Sending another person malicious software that can be used to access information on their computer	-.05	-.12	.78

Note: The higher factor loading for each item appears in boldface type.

Table 12: Correlation coefficients between variables included in the factor analysis

Items:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1	1.00	.58	.68	.44	.38	.37	.33	.38	.28	.24	.25	.34	.19	.19	.28	.28	.19	.15
2		1.00	.44	.75	.32	.34	.36	.43	.31	.19	.17	.44	.24	.27	.25	.27	.14	.19
3			1.00	.52	.47	.45	.31	.41	.29	.27	.3	.34	.29	.27	.32	.31	.17	.21
4				1.00	.39	.41	.41	.47	.32	.23	.18	.5	.32	.35	.22	.29	.16	.29
5					1.00	.92	.47	.37	.37	.33	.37	.4	.32	.25	.26	.56	.26	.39
6						1.00	.48	.4	.39	.35	.36	.44	.36	.28	.25	.56	.25	.4
7							1.00	.52	.51	.38	.33	.39	.36	.29	.27	.49	.35	.34
8								1.00	.53	.33	.34	.37	.36	.37	.32	.39	.31	.33
9									1.00	.44	.39	.37	.24	.23	.33	.43	.34	.34
10										1.00	.58	.42	.21	.11	.27	.5	.33	.33
11											1.00	.4	.17	.13	.31	.46	.36	.32
12												1.00	.36	.28	.29	.44	.26	.35
13													1.00	.64	.15	.4	.27	.45
14														1.00	.25	.31	.22	.34
15															1.00	.41	.31	.22
16																1.00	.47	.47
17																	1.00	.52
18																		1.00

Note: The item numbers refer to

- 1 = Sending numerous, unsolicited messages via the Internet that are sexually explicit or obscene
- 2 = Sending numerous, unsolicited messages via the Internet that are abusive or threatening
- 3 = Sending numerous, unsolicited messages via mobile phone that are sexually explicit or obscene
- 4 = Sending numerous, unsolicited messages via mobile phone that are abusive or threatening
- 5 = Sending emails to a person's friends, family or work colleagues in an attempt to destroy their reputation
- 6 = Sending improper messages to a person's friends family or work colleagues in an attempt to destroy their reputation
- 7 = Posting false information on the internet about a person
- 8 = Posting someone's contact information online in a way that solicits sex
- 9 = Posting sexually explicit pictures on the internet that have been changed to resemble another person
- 10 = Changing online identity to contact someone who has blocked previous contact attempts
- 11 = Telling someone in an online 'chat' information about their offline life that they did not disclose
- 12 = Encouraging other internet users to be abusive towards someone
- 13 = Sending malicious software that can damage their hardware or software
- 14 = Sending malicious software that can be used to access information stored on their computer
- 15 = Telling someone in an online 'chat' that you have followed them offline
- 16 = Using an identity/screen name similar to another person and contacting their friends to destroy their reputation
- 17 = Subscribing another person to online services that they did not want
- 18 = Spamming another person's email in an attempt to disrupt or disable their email

Factor 1 was labelled as '*Deception/Disclosure*'. This factor included items that involved the perpetrator deceiving a person or other Internet users in relation to that person. Such items included changing one's online identity in an attempt to contact someone who had previously blocked their online contact attempts, posting sexually explicit pictures on the Internet that had been changed to resemble a particular person, and posting false information on the Internet about a particular person. The disclosure element of the factor included items that involved the perpetrator disclosing information to a person. Such items included telling someone in an online chat that they had followed them offline, or telling them information about his/her offline life that he/she did not disclose. What the items had in common was that the deception and disclosure involved malicious intentions. Factor 2 was labelled as '*Harassing Messages*'. This factor included items whereby a perpetrator was sending someone abusive/threatening messages via the Internet or mobile phone, sending sexually explicit messages via the Internet or mobile phone, and encouraging other internet users to be abusive to someone. Factor 3 was labelled as '*Malicious software*'. This factor included two items that involved sending someone malicious software that could be used to damage that person's software/hardware or to access information held on someone's computer.

Table 13: Matrix Showing the Correlations between Each of the Factors

Factor:	<i>Deception/Disclosure</i>	<i>Harassing Messages</i>	<i>Malicious Software</i>
<i>Deception/Disclosure</i>	1.00	-.45	.39
<i>Harassing Messages</i>	-.45	1.00	-.33
<i>Malicious Software</i>	.39	-.33	1.00

Finally, the correlation matrix (Table 13) shows each of the factors correlated with each of the other factors with all coefficients greater than .3. This indicates the factors were inter-related, confirming that direct oblimin rotation was the correct method in these analyses.

Although normality violations were observed for the factors *Harassing Messages* and *Malicious Software*, the ANOVA statistic is considered to be robust to assumption violations (Field, 2005). One-way repeated measures ANOVA was used to see if there were any significant main effects on perceived criminality of online behaviours. Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had not been violated ($\chi^2(2) = 1.28, p = .53$). Results indicated a significant difference between the ratings of criminality on the three factors $F(2, 636) = 376.82, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .54$. Using the Bonferroni post-hoc

test, significant differences were found between the factors. *Malicious Software* was perceived the most criminal act, followed by *Harassing Messages*. *Deception/Disclosure* was not perceived as criminal.

Between groups ANOVA revealed significant gender differences in perceived criminality of harassing messages $F_{(1, 317)} = 5.64, p = .02$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$: females ($M = 4.2, SD = .73$) rated harassing messages as more criminal than males ($M = 3.97, SD = .98$). Females ($M = 3.4, SD = .87$) rated deception/disclosure as more criminal than males ($M = 3.27, SD = .98$) and males ($M = 4.75, SD = .64$) rated malicious software as more criminal than females ($M = 4.6, SD = .72$). However, these differences were not significant.

4.3.1.3 The role of personality in the perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours

A series of regression analyses were conducted to explore the relationship between Internet self-efficacy, the 'Big Five' personality characteristics, and each of the three factors. The data was checked to confirm suitability for regression analyses, and none of the assumptions were violated.

Table 14: Multiple Regressions using Internet self-efficacy and the 'Big Five' personality dimensions as predictors for *Deception/Disclosure*, *Malicious Software*, and *Harassing Messages*.

						Confidence Intervals			
	B	SE B	β	t	p	Lower	Upper	Tolerance	VIF
<i>Harassing Messages</i>									
Constant	5.21	.69							
Agreeableness	-.33	.15	-.2	-2.3	.02*	-.62	-.05	.41	2.41
<i>Malicious Software</i>									
Constant	4.96	.57							
Internet Self-Efficacy	.08	.03	.16	2.93	.004**	.03	.14	.98	1.03

Note: * = $p < .05$.
** = $p < .01$.

The enter method was used to identify significant variables that predicted individuals' perceptions of criminality on the three factors. Results indicated that Agreeableness $\beta = -.2, t = -2.3, p = .02$ was a significant predictor of harassing messages $F_{(6,313)} = 2.34, p = .03$, explaining 4.3% of the variance (Table 14). Those who scored high in Agreeableness were less likely to perceive harassing messages as criminal. The results also indicated that Internet self-efficacy $\beta = .16, t = 2.93, p < .01$ was a significant predictor for malicious

software $F_{(6, 312)} = 2.25, p = .04$, explaining 4.1% of the variance. Those who scored high in Internet self-efficacy were more likely to perceive malicious software as criminal.

4.3.2 Experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours

4.3.2.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 15 shows the percentages of participants who reported experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours. Nearly half the sample reported receiving malicious software that could damage their hardware or software. The next frequently reported behaviours included receiving numerous, unsolicited sexually explicit or obscene messages via the Internet, someone changing their online identity to contact an individual because previous contacts had been blocked, being sent malicious software that could be used to access information held on one's computer, being subscribed by someone to unwanted online services, having one's email spammed in an attempt to disrupt service, receiving numerous unsolicited sexually explicit or obscene messages to one's mobile phone, and being told information about one's offline life that one did not disclose. The least frequently occurring behaviours included having one's contact information posted on the Internet in a way that solicits sex, having sexually explicit pictures posted on the Internet that have been changed to resemble oneself, and being told in an online 'chat' that the person you are chatting to has followed you offline.

Table 15: Descriptive statistics showing the percentages of those who reported experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours

Item:	Responses %			
	Yes	No	Not Sure	Prefer Not to Say
13. Being sent malicious software that could damage your hardware or software	41.7	48.3	10	0
1. Receiving numerous, unsolicited sexually explicit or obscene messages via the Internet	29.5	66.5	3.4	.6
10. Changing online identities in an attempt to contact one because previous contacts were blocked	26.6	67.4	6	0
14. Being sent malicious software that could be used to access information held on your computer	25.5	58.5	16	0
17. Being subscribed to unwanted online services by someone else	25.5	65.1	9.4	0
18. Having your email spammed in an attempt to disrupt/disable your email	22.6	64.8	12.6	0
3. Receiving numerous, unsolicited sexually explicit or obscene messages via mobile phone	21.6	77.2	.6	.6

11. Someone telling you information about your offline life that you did not disclose	20.1	72.4	7.5	0
7. Someone posting false information on the Internet about you	19.7	66.2	14.1	0
2. Receiving numerous, unsolicited abusive and/or threatening messages via the Internet	19.4	78.4	1.9	.3
4. Receiving numerous, unsolicited abusive and/or threatening messages via mobile phone	15.7	83.4	.9	0
12. Someone encouraging other Internet users to be abusive or threatening to you	13.5	78.3	8.2	0
5. Friends, family, or work colleagues being sent email messages in an attempt to embarrass or damage one's reputation	11.6	79.3	9.1	0
6. Friends, family, or work colleagues being sent messages to their mobile phone in an attempt to embarrass or damage one's reputation	9.1	83.1	7.8	0
16. Having someone use a similar identity or screen name to yours and contacting your friends to damage your reputation	8.5	87.5	4	0
15. Someone telling you in an online 'chat' that they had followed you offline	4.7	91.9	3.4	0
9. Having sexually explicit pictures posted on the Internet that have been changed to resemble one	4.1	92.4	3.5	0
8. Having your contact information posted on the Internet in a way that solicits sex	2.2	93.7	4.1	0

Note: N = 320

4.3.2.2 Gender differences in experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours

Table 16 shows gender differences in experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours. Chi Square was used to identify significant gender differences in experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours. As a lot of chi square analyses were run, the cut-off was reduced from .05 to .01 to ensure the findings are significant. Males were more likely than females to receive numerous unsolicited abusive and/or threatening messages via the Internet, and to be subscribed to unwanted online services. No other significant gender differences were found.

Table 16: Gender breakdown relating to experiencing online behaviours

Item:	Gender %		χ^2	p
	Males	Females		
13. Being sent malicious software that could damage your hardware or software	48.6	45.1	.33	.57
1. Receiving numerous, unsolicited sexually explicit or obscene messages via the Internet	31.5	30.5	.03	.85
14. Being sent malicious software that could be used to access information held on your computer	39	25.1	5.68	.02
10. Changing online identities in an attempt to contact one because previous contacts were blocked	27.5	28.4	.03	.87
17. Being subscribed to unwanted online services by someone else	42.6	20.4	15.85	.000**
18. Having your email spammed in an attempt to disrupt/disable your	29.1	24.1	.84	.36

email				
7. Having false information posted on the Internet	25.5	21.7	.51	.48
3. Receiving numerous, unsolicited sexually explicit or obscene messages via mobile phone	20.9	22.5	.11	.74
11. Being told information about one's offline life that one did not disclose	23.6	20.7	.32	.57
2. Receiving numerous, unsolicited abusive and/or threatening messages via the Internet	29	15.2	8.35	.004*
4. Receiving numerous, unsolicited abusive and/or threatening messages via mobile phone	13.5	17.2	.75	.39
12. Encouraging other Internet users to be abusive or threatening to one	17.5	13.2	.96	.33
5. Friends, family, or work colleagues being sent email messages in an attempt to embarrass or damage one's reputation	18.4	9.5	4.68	.03
6. Friends, family, or work colleagues being sent messages to their mobile phone in an attempt to embarrass or damage one's reputation	12.7	8.4	1.42	.23
16. Having someone use a similar identity or screen name to yours and contacting your friends to damage your reputation	9.6	8.5	.11	.74
15. Being told in an online 'chat' that the person you are chatting to has followed you offline	4.7	5	.01	.92
9. Having sexually explicit pictures posted on the Internet that have been changed to resemble one	4.7	4	.09	.77
8. Having your contact information posted on the Internet in a way that solicits sex	1.9	2.5	.12	.73

NOTE: * = $p < .01$
 ** = $p < .001$

4.3.2.3 The role of personality predicting the experience cyber-harassing behaviours

A series of logistic regression analyses (using the entry method) were used see if the 'Big Five' personality characteristics and Internet self-efficacy predicted whether participants experienced each of the cyber-harassing behaviours. Table 17 illustrates the associated statistics relating to significant models.

For *receiving abusive messages via the Internet*, a total of 312 cases were analysed and a significant model emerged ($\chi^2 (6) = 15.6, p = .02$). The model accounted for 4.9% to 7.7% of the variance (Cox and Snell $R^2 = .05$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .08$). The Hosmer and Lemeshow test ($\chi^2 (8) = 9.88, p = .27$) indicated the model was a good fit. Overall, the model was 80.1% accurate, with 100% of cases correctly identified for not receiving abusive messages via the Internet but 0% of cases correctly identified for receiving abusive messages via the Internet. It should be noted that the explanatory power did not increase from blindly estimating the outcome. Thus, minority status (i.e., receiving abusive messages via the Internet) cannot be differentiated on the basis of personality and Internet self-efficacy.

Internet self-efficacy was the only predictor variable that reliably predicted not receiving abusive messages via the Internet.

Table 17: Logistic Regression Analyses

Included	B (SE)	Wald	<i>p</i>	95% CI for exp <i>b</i>		
				Lower	exp <i>b</i>	Upper
<i>Receiving abusive messages via the Internet</i>						
Constant	-4.96 (2.26)	4.81	.03		.01	
Internet self-efficacy	.37 (.12)	9.93	.002	1.15	1.44	1.82
<i>Receiving abusive messages via mobile phone</i>						
Constant	-7.82 (2.44)	10.28	.001		.000	
Agreeableness	1.14 (.52)	4.86	.03	1.13	3.11	8.54
<i>Being subscribed to unwanted online services</i>						
Constant	-2.56 (2.04)	1.58	.21		.08	
Neuroticism	.86 (.32)	7.49	.006	1.28	2.37	4.40
Internet self-efficacy	.26 (.10)	-6.58	.01	1.06	1.30	1.59

For *receiving abusive messages via mobile phone*, a total of 315 cases were analysed and a significant model emerged (χ^2 (6) = 20.33, p = .002). The model accounted for 6.2% to 10.7% of the variance (Cox and Snell R^2 = .062, Nagelkerke R^2 = .11). The Hosmer and Lemeshow test (χ^2 (8) = 6.01, p = .65) indicated the model was a good fit. Overall, the model was 84.1% accurate, with all but one case correctly identified for not receiving abusive messages via mobile phone but only predicts one case receiving abusive messages via mobile phone. It should be noted that the explanatory power did not increase from blindly estimating the outcome. Agreeableness was a significant predictor variable that reliably predicted not receiving abusive messages via mobile phone.

For *being subscribed to unwanted online services*, a total of 288 cases were analysed and a significant model emerged (χ^2 (6) = 13.92, p = .03). The model accounted for 4.7% to 6.8% of the variance (Cox and Snell R^2 = .05, Nagelkerke R^2 = .07). The Hosmer and Lemeshow test (χ^2 (8) = 6.89, p = .55) indicated the model was a good fit. Overall, the model was 71.9% accurate, with all but 3 cases correctly identified for not being subscribed to unwanted services, but only predicts three cases of being subscribed to unwanted services. It should be noted that the explanatory power did not increase from blindly estimating the outcome. Neuroticism and Internet self-efficacy were significant predictor variables that reliably predicted not being subscribed to unwanted online services.

4.3.2.4 The relationship between personality, Internet self-efficacy, experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours and upset

The total number of experienced behaviours was calculated for each participant. Pearson's correlation was used to see if there was a relationship between the number of behaviours individuals experienced and how upset they were by their experiences. A positive correlation was found ($r = .17, p = .01$), indicating that how upset individuals were by their experiences was positively associated with the number of behaviours they experienced, although this effect was weak.

Regression analyses were used to see if personality, Internet self-efficacy, or the behaviours experienced predicted participants' ratings of upset. The data were checked to confirm suitability for analyses, and all assumptions were met. A significant model emerged $F_{(18, 92)} = 2.47; p = .003$, explaining 32.6% of the variance in ratings of upset. Receiving abusive and/or threatening messages to their mobile phone ($\beta = .47, t = 4.41, p < .001$), someone changing their online identity in an attempt to contact participants when previous contact attempts had been blocked ($\beta = .25, t = 2.45, p = .02$), being told information about one's offline life that one did not disclose ($\beta = .25, t = 2.35, p = .02$), and receiving malicious software that could be used to damage one's hardware and/or software ($\beta = .26, t = 2.3, p = .02$) significantly predicted participants' ratings of upset. No other variables significantly contributed to the model.

4.3.2.4.1 Gender differences in ratings of upset

An independent samples t-test indicated that there were significant gender differences in participants' ratings of upset following their experiences of cyber-harassing behaviours ($t = -3.54; df = 230, p < .001$). Females ($M = 4.88; SD = 2.9$) rated their experiences as more upsetting than males ($M = 3.52; SD = 2.8$).

4.3.3 Perceived peer support in the experience of cyber-harassing behaviours

4.3.3.1 Multiple Response Analyses

Participants were asked to report who they would tell if they experienced each of the 18 cyber-harassing behaviours. As participants could select more than one response for the behaviours, the data were subjected to multiple response analysis. This is a more useful way to describe the behaviours as the percentages are of the total responses selected.

As can be seen from Table 18, for each of the cyber-harassing behaviours, the friend category yielded the highest percentage for who participants would tell. The only exception was if participants received malicious software that could be used to access information held on their computer; 20.1% of responses indicated participants would tell their friend and 20.8% of responses indicated participants would tell their ISP. Participants were most likely to tell their family if the perpetrator contacted their friends, family or work colleagues via email and via mobile phone to damage their reputation (27% and 27.9%, respectively).

Participants were most likely to tell the police if a perpetrator sent them abusive or threatening messages to their mobile phone, or if an online chat partner told them they had followed them offline (25% and 23.3%, respectively). Participants would be least likely to contact the police if their email was spammed in an attempt to disrupt their email service, if someone changed their online identities to contact the participants after previous contacts were blocked, and if they were subscribed to unwanted online services (4.2%, 5%, and 5.7%, respectively).

Participants reported being most likely to tell no-one if a perpetrator changed his/her online identity to contact them after previous contacts were blocked, and if a perpetrator told them information about their offline life during an online chat (14.5% and 11.3%, respectively). Participants were least likely to tell no-one if they received abusive and/or threatening messages to their mobile phone (2.5%).

4.3.3.2 Gender differences in perceived social support for the experience of cyber-harassing behaviours

Significant gender differences arose in who participants imagined they would tell if they experienced the 18 behaviours. Table 19 shows the percentages of males and females who reported they would tell, and the relevant chi square statistics. Females were more likely than males to tell a *friend* if they experienced all of the behaviours, with the exception of someone sending their friends, family or work colleagues improper messages to their mobile phone to embarrass them or damage their reputation, someone telling them in an online ‘chat’ that they had followed them offline, someone using a similar online identity to them to contact their friends to damage their reputation, being subscribed to unwanted online services, or if someone spammed their email in an attempt to disable or disrupt their email service.

Females were more likely than males to tell their *family* if they 1) received numerous, unsolicited messages via the Internet that were abusive and/or threatening; 2) if someone encouraged other Internet users to be abusive and/or threatening towards them; 3) if they received malicious software that could be used to damage their hardware or software; 4) if they received malicious software that could be used to access information held on their computer; and 5) if they were sent spam in an attempt to disrupt or disable their email.

Males were more likely than females to tell *no-one* if 1) they received abusive or threatening messages to their mobile phone, 2) false information was posted on the Internet about them, 3) their contact information was posted on the Internet in a way that solicited sex, 4) sexually explicit pictures were changed to resemble them and posted on the Internet, 5) someone told them in an online ‘chat’ information about their offline life they did not disclose, 6) someone encouraged other Internet users to be abusive and/or threatening to them, 7) they received malicious software that could damage their hardware and/or software or 8) access information held on their computer, and 9) someone told them in an online ‘chat’ they followed them offline. Finally, males were more likely than females to tell the police if someone sent them malicious software that could be used to damage their hardware or software.

Table 18: Percentages of who participants would tell if they experienced cyber-harassing behaviours

Behaviour	Friend	Family	ISP / Mobile Phone Operator	IM	Police	Doctor	University	No- one	Don't know	Other
1. Sexually explicit messages via Internet	29.7	13.6	15	16.3	10.6	.2	3	7.3	3.2	1.1
2. Abusive/threatening messages via Internet	24.2	18.2	14.2	13.9	19.7	0	3.9	3.6	1.5	.7
3. Sexually explicit messages via mobile phone	32.3	14.5	24.2	-	15.7	.2	1.8	6	3.8	1.4
4. Abusive/threatening messages via mobile phone	26.5	19.6	19.9	-	25	.2	2.8	2.6	2.5	1
5. Contacting friends, family or work colleagues via email to damage reputation	33.6	27	8.9	7.1	8	.2	2.6	4.2	5.1	3.3
6. Contacting friends, family or work colleagues via mobile phone to damage reputation	35.2	27.9	9.6	4.5	7.3	.5	2.1	4.3	5.5	3
7. Posting false information online	27.9	18	11.8	19.6	9.1	.2	2	5.1	5.1	1.3
8. Posting contact information in a way that solicits sex	23.2	13	12.8	17.9	22	.5	2.2	3.4	3.9	1
9. Posting sexually explicit pictures that have been changed to resemble you	24.9	13.1	13.2	19	17.8	.3	1.9	4.7	3.5	1.6
10. Changing online identity to contact you after blocking previous contacts	30.7	13.6	12.7	15.1	5	.4	2	14.5	4.4	1.5
11. Being told in online chat information about offline life	31.5	18.8	8.4	10.5	9.6	.4	1.3	11.3	6.6	1.5
12. Encouraging other Internet users to be abusive	25.6	17.1	12.1	17.8	14.1	.4	1.5	6.3	3.7	1.5
13. Receiving malicious software that could damage hardware or software	21.2	17.1	20.6	19.6	9.7	.2	1.8	4.8	3.6	1.4
14. Receiving malicious software that can be used to access information held on computer	20.1	16.3	20.8	18.7	13.7	0	1.7	4.3	3.1	1.4
15. Being told in online chat that chat partner has followed you offline	29.3	20.5	7.2	7.4	23.3	.4	2.1	4.7	4.0	1.1
16. Using a similar ID to you to contact online friends and damage reputation	25.6	20.9	11	13.2	6.5	.4	1.7	4.8	4.3	1.7
17. Being subscribed to unwanted online services	22.8	12.4	21.1	20.3	5.7	0	1.1	9.9	4.6	2.1
18. Receiving spam to disrupt email service	23.8	13.1	24.1	19.8	4.2	.2	1.3	9.1	4.4	0

Table 19: Gender differences in who participants thought they would tell if they experienced cyber-harassing behaviours

Item		Within gender breakdown of responses %							
		Friend	Family	Internet Service Provider	Internet Moderator	Police	University	No-one	Mobile phone company
1. Receiving numerous unsolicited sexually explicit or obscene messages via the Internet	Males	41.6	19.8	30.7	32.7	22.8	6.9	19.8	N/A
	Females	67	30.3	28.7	31.4	19.1	5.3	11.2	
	$\chi^2(p)$	17.5 (.000)**	3.7 (.05)	.1 (.7)	.1 (.8)	.5 (.5)	.3 (.6)	4 (.05)	
2. Receiving numerous unsolicited abusive and/or threatening messages via the Internet	Males	40.2	29.4	33.3	37.3	42.2	9.8	12.7	N/A
	Females	65.6	50	33.3	30.1	47.8	8.6	5.9	
	$\chi^2(p)$	17.3 (.000)**	11.4 (.001)*	.0 (1.0)	1.5 (.2)	.9 (.4)	.1 (.7)	4 (.05)	
3. Receiving numerous, unsolicited sexually explicit and/or obscene messages via mobile phone	Males	40.6	21.8	N/A	N/A	23.8	4	16.8	46.5
	Females	64.7	27.2			28.8	2.7	7.1	39.7
	$\chi^2(p)$	15.4 (.000)**	1 (.3)			.8 (.4)	.3 (.6)	6.6 (.01)*	1.3 (.3)
4. Receiving numerous, unsolicited abusive and/or threatening messages via mobile phone	Males	45	35	N/A	N/A	52	7	10	44
	Females	62.9	45.7			53.8	5.4	3.2	41.9
	$\chi^2(p)$	8.5 (.004)*	3.1 (.08)			.1 (.8)	.3 (.6)	5.7 (.02)	.1 (.7)
5. Sending your friends, family or work colleagues email messages in an attempt to embarrass you or damage your reputation	Males	57.4	47.5	19.8	17.8	20.8	5	9.9	N/A
	Females	71.7	56.7	16.6	12.3	13.4	5.3	7.5	
	$\chi^2(p)$	6 (.01)*	2.2 (.1)	.5 (.5)	1.6 (.2)	2.7 (.1)	.0 (.9)	.5 (.5)	
6. Sending your friends, family or work colleagues improper messages to their mobile phone to embarrass you or damage your reputation	Males	61.8	49	21.6	12.7	16.7	4.9	9.8	N/A
	Females	71.1	56.1	17.1	6.4	12.8	3.7	7.5	
	$\chi^2(p)$	2.7 (.1)	1.4 (.3)	.9 (.4)	3.3 (.1)	.8 (.4)	.2 (.6)	.5 (.5)	
7. Having false information posted on the Internet about you	Males	38.6	27.7	18.8	42.6	18.8	3	16.8	N/A
	Females	61.5	38	24.6	34.2	16.6	4.3	5.9	
	$\chi^2(p)$	13.8 (.000)**	3.1 (.1)	1.3 (.3)	2 (.2)	.2 (.6)	.3 (.6)	9 (.003)*	
8. Having your contact information posted online in a way that solicits sex	Males	31	18	23	43	43	4	13	N/A
	Females	56.8	31.4	28.1	33	46.5	4.9	3.8	
	$\chi^2(p)$	17.3 (.000)**	5.9 (.02)	.9 (.4)	2.8 (.1)	.3 (.6)	.1 (.7)	8.6 (.004)*	
9. Having sexually explicit pictures posted on the Internet that have been changed to resemble you	Males	32.3	18.2	21.2	43.4	29.3	5.1	20.2	N/A
	Females	59.1	30.6	29.6	34.9	39.2	3.2	3.8	
	$\chi^2(p)$	18.6 (.000)**	5.2 (.02)	2.3 (.1)	2 (.2)	2.8 (.1)	.6 (.5)	22.5 (.000)**	
10. Having someone change their online identity to contact you when you	Males	39	21	22	29	10	4	29	N/A
	Females	54.3	22	19.4	21.5	7	2.7	19.4	

have blocked their previous contacts	$\chi^2 (p)$	6.1 (.01)*	.0 (.8)	.3 (.6)	2 (.2)	.8 (.4)	.4 (.5)	3.5 (.06)	
11. Being told information about your offline life that you did not disclose	Males	35.6	21.8	12.9	17.8	14.9	3	27.7	
	Females	59.5	35.7	14.1	16.8	16.2	1.6	13	N/A
	$\chi^2 (p)$	14.8 (.000)**	5.9 (.02)	.1 (.8)	.1 (.8)	.1 (.8)	.6 (.5)	9.6 (.002)*	
12. Having someone encourage other Internet users to be abusive and/or threatening towards you	Males	31.6	21.4	22.4	38.8	24.5	3.1	19.4	
	Females	57.5	38.2	23.1	30.6	28	2.7	7.5	N/A
	$\chi^2 (p)$	17.2 (.000)**	8.2 (.004)*	.0 (.9)	1.9 (.2)	.4 (.5)	.0 (.9)	8.8 (.003)*	
13. Being sent malicious software that could be used to damage your software and/or hardware	Males	27.3	23.2	38.4	43.4	27.3	4	18.2	
	Females	48.9	38.7	41.4	35.5	14.5	3.2	4.3	N/A
	$\chi^2 (p)$	12.5 (.000)**	6.9 (.01)*	.2 (.6)	1.7 (.2)	6.9 (.01)*	.1 (.7)	15 (.000)**	
14. Being sent malicious software that could be used to access information held on your computer	Males	26	21	41	41	34	4	17	
	Females	47.9	38.8	42	35.6	23.9	3.2	3.7	N/A
	$\chi^2 (p)$	13 (.000)**	9.4 (.002)*	.0 (.9)	.8 (.4)	3.3 (.07)	.1 (.7)	15.1 (.000)**	
15. Someone telling you in an online chat that they followed you offline	Males	50.5	32.3	15.2	17.2	44.4	3	17.2	
	Females	62.9	45.7	14	13.4	47.8	4.8	4.8	N/A
	$\chi^2 (p)$	4.1 (.05)	4.8 (.03)	.07 (.8)	.7 (.4)	.3 (.6)	.5 (.5)	11.9 (.001)*	
16. Someone using a similar online identity to yours to contact your friends in an attempt to destroy your reputation	Males	58.6	38.4	22.2	32.3	16.2	4	15.2	
	Females	71	39.2	19.9	21	10.2	2.7	5.9	N/A
	$\chi^2 (p)$	4.5 (.04)	.0 (.9)	.2 (.6)	4.5 (.04)	2.1 (.2)	.4 (.5)	6.7 (.01)*	
17. Being subscribed to online services you did not want	Males	28.6	14.3	37.8	39.8	8.2	2	23.5	
	Females	43.2	24.3	34.1	30.8	10.3	1.6	12.4	N/A
	$\chi^2 (p)$	5.8 (.02)	3.9 (.05)	.4 (.5)	2.3 (.1)	.3 (.8)	.1 (.8)	5.7 (.02)	
18. Someone spamming your email in an attempt to disable or disrupt your email	Males	30.3	11.1	45.5	36.4	8.1	3	21.2	
	Females	44.9	27.6	37.3	31.4	6.5	1.6	11.4	N/A
	$\chi^2 (p)$	5.7 (.02)	10.2 (.001)*	1.8 (.2)	.7 (.4)	.3 (.6)	.6 (.4)	5 (.03)	

Note: * $p < .01$
 ** $p < .001$

4.4 Discussion

This study aimed to determine the types of cyber-harassing behaviours that undergraduate students experience and perceive as criminal. Furthermore, the study assessed whether the ‘Big Five’ personality characteristics and Internet self-efficacy predicted the likelihood of experiencing, or the perceived criminality, of cyber-harassing behaviours. Finally, the study assessed perceived peer support that participants would avail of, should they experience cyber-harassment. Discussion of the findings is divided into three sections: 1) perceived criminality of cyber-harassment; 2) experiences of cyber-harassment; and 3) perceived peer support in dealing with cyber-harassment.

4.4.1 Perceived criminality of cyber-harassment

Following factor analysis of the data, three factors emerged that were underlying participants’ perceptions of criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours. Participants perceived *Malicious Software* and *Harassing Messages* as criminal but did not perceive *Deception/Disclosure* as criminal. Whilst the null hypothesis was expected, the findings partially support the hypothesis that participants would perceive cyber-harassing behaviours as criminal. This finding contradicts the findings of previous research (e.g., Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005), and theoretical assumptions that individuals do not perceive online behaviours as having offline consequences (see Suler, 2004; Whitty, 2007). However, perceiving online behaviour as not having offline consequences may relate specifically to one’s own behaviour and not to others’ behaviour.

The items that loaded on the *Malicious Software* and *Harassing Messages* factors indicated behaviours that could be prosecuted within the UK using the *Computer Misuse Act* (1990) and the *Malicious Software Act* (1998) as single offences. Consequently, participants may have clear ideas about legislation within the UK and may have known that these items could be prosecuted as single offences. As such, participants may have recognised that the items loading on the *Deception/Disclosure* factor were indicative of cyber-harassment. However, the *PfHA* stipulates that perpetrators must pursue a course of conduct that causes the victim alarm or distress. Participants may have been aware of these requirements but

needed further information before they could make judgements about whether the behaviours were criminal.

Alternatively, participants may have judged the behaviours as criminal depending on whether they involved threat to the victim. For instance, the items that loaded on *Malicious Software* threatened the victim's computer hardware and/or software, or personal information stored on the computer. Similarly, the items that loaded on *Harassing Messages* involved sending the victim abusive and/or threatening messages via the Internet or to their mobile phone. In contrast, the items that loaded onto the *Deception/Disclosure* factor did not involve any explicitly threatening behaviour towards the victim.

The 'Big Five' personality characteristics and Internet self-efficacy did not consistently predict the perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours. Therefore, the hypotheses making predictions between personality, Internet self-efficacy and the perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours were rejected. However, there were two exceptions to this finding. First, individuals who scored high on agreeableness were less likely to perceive *Harassing Messages* as criminal, compared to low scorers. Agreeable individuals may have perceived the items that loaded on *Harassing Messages* as more personal than behaviours that loaded on other factors. Theoretically, high-agreeable individuals are better able to control negative affect (Bono, Boles, Judge & Lauver, 2002), and are highly motivated to maintain positive interpersonal relations. The desire to maintain positive relations with others may explain why highly agreeable individuals were less likely to perceive *Harassing Messages* as criminal.

Second, individuals who scored high on Internet self-efficacy were more likely to perceive *Malicious Software* as criminal, compared to low scorers. According to Eastin and LaRose (2000), Internet self-efficacy is strongly associated with prior experience using the Internet. Experienced Internet users may be more aware of the damage that can be caused by malicious software in comparison to other cyber-harassing behaviours compared to novice users. They may realise that malicious software may cause instability in your computer and its components or software, or allow the owner access to your computer and any information stored on it. All of these behaviours may have significant financial costs to the victim. Therefore, low Internet self-efficacious individuals may not have enough

knowledge and/or Internet experience to recognise the threatening nature of such behaviours and may explain why they were less likely to perceive malicious software as criminal.

Despite the two exceptions above, personality and Internet self-efficacy did not consistently predict participants' judgements of criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours. This indicates that other factors may yield greater explanatory power to the perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours. Lerner and Miller's (1978) just world hypothesis may provide a better explanation to the findings than personality characteristics. According to their hypothesis, individuals need to believe that people get what they deserve, thus allowing them to perceive their world as stable and controllable. It may be that participants' perceived a greater lack of control on the victim's behalf if they were to experience behaviours associated with *Malicious Software* or *Harassing Messages*. The perceived lack of control the victim has may have shattered participants' beliefs in a just world. Consequently, participants may have been motivated to re-establish equilibrium in their perceptions of the world, and deemed behaviours associated with *Malicious Software* and *Harassing Messages* as criminal.

4.4.2 Experiencing cyber-harassment

This study revealed a wide range of cyber-harassing behaviours experienced by participants. Nearly half of the participants in this study reported receiving malicious software that could damage their hardware or software, and was the most frequently reported behaviour. Bocij (2003) also reported that participants frequently received malicious software. However, participants' in this study reported experiencing a greater range of behaviours in comparison to Bocij's study. This may reflect a change in the methods used by perpetrators as the Internet evolves and software becomes easier to use.

Participants reported that the least frequently experienced included having their contact information posted on the Internet in a way that solicited sex, and having sexually explicit pictures posted on the Internet that had been changed to resemble them. There have been instances of cyberstalking whereby perpetrators have used these methods to harass their victim. For example, Cynthia Armistead's information had been posted online in a way

that solicited sex (Griffiths, Rogers, & Sparrow, 1998). However, the current findings suggest these tactics are atypical representations of cyber-harassment.

Contrasting previous harassment research, the findings of this study suggest that males and females experience the majority of cyber-harassing behaviours to a similar degree. The trend found in research investigating offline harassment indicates that females are more likely to be victimised than males (Ashmore, Jones, Jackson, & Smoyak, 2006; Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Kienlen, Birmingham, Solberg, & O'Regan, 1997; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2003; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The lack of empirical research investigating cyber-harassment has resulted in inconsistent findings between the few studies that have been conducted. However, Bocij (2004) argues that a major deviation from offline harassment is that males are more likely to report being victimised than their offline counterparts and there is some research lending support to this argument, with 35% to 51% of cyber-harassment victims being male (D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003; Finkelhor, Mitchell & Wolak, 2000, respectively). Thus, the findings of this study provide further indication that males are more likely to experience (or at least report) cyber-harassment compared to offline harassment.

The finding that there were few gender differences in experiences of cyber-harassing behaviours, and in some instances males were more likely to experience cyber-harassing behaviours lends some support to the equalisation hypothesis. Cues that are visible in face-to-face communication (such as gender, age, and ethnicity) are not apparent in online communications. According to the equalisation hypothesis, the reduction in these cues leads to perceived equalisation of social status among low and high status individuals (Dubrovsky, Kiesler, & Sethna, 1991). Therefore, males may be more likely targeted in cyber-harassment than their offline counterparts.

The survey was conducted anonymously by participants and the online disinhibition effect may account for the findings. Reips (2000) argues that participants are more open on the Internet than offline. Research has demonstrated that participants are likely to disclose more in IMR than offline methods and this may be due to the anonymity provided by the Internet (Buchanan, 2002; Buchanan & Smith, 1999; Joinson, 2001). Additionally, as participants perceive themselves as anonymous, they are less likely to respond in a socially

desirable manner (Joinson, 1999). This being the case, male participants may have felt less anxiety over admitting to experiencing these behaviours because they could not be identified.

Similar to findings relating to the perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours, personality did not consistently predict the likelihood of experiencing cyber-harassment. However, significant predictions were found in relation to specific cyber-harassing behaviours. First, individuals who scored high in Internet self-efficacy were less likely to receive abusive or threatening messages via the Internet. As Internet self-efficacy is related to prior internet experience (Eastin & LaRose, 2000), high scorers may be more aware of how to protect themselves from receiving abusive or threatening messages via the Internet. Second, individuals who scored high on agreeableness were less likely to receive abusive or threatening messages to their mobile phone. Mobile phone communication may be regarded as more personal than online communications. This supports previous research that suggests highly agreeable individuals are more adept at avoiding confrontation than individuals scoring low on agreeableness (Bono, Boles, Judge & Lauver, 2002; Dijkstra, van Dierendonck, Evers & De Dreu, 2005). Finally, individuals who scored high on neuroticism or Internet self-efficacy were less likely to be subscribed to unwanted services. According to McCrae and Costa (1985, 1987), individuals who score high on neuroticism are worriers, insecure, self-conscious, anxious, angry, and mistrustful. Whilst previous research suggests that highly neurotic individuals are more likely to experience interpersonal conflict (Bono, Boles, Judge & Lauver, 2002), being subscribed to unwanted services does not constitute interpersonal conflict. Subscribing someone to unwanted services may require a certain level of personal knowledge of the victim of this behaviour. For instance, the perpetrator would need to know the victim's full name, email address, and other personal information (such as their address or date of birth). Considering the untrusting nature of the neurotic individual, these individuals may be more careful about their online security, and may divulge less personal information to people on the Internet. In effect, this may protect them from experiencing this type of behaviour.

Participants who experienced cyber-harassing behaviours were asked to indicate how upset they were by their experiences. Personality and Internet self-efficacy were not associated with the degree to which participants were upset by cyber-harassment. This contradicts

previous research implying associations between personality and reactions to conflict (Crow, Hartman, Hammond & Fok, 1995; Graziano, Jensen-Campbell & Hair, 1996; McCrae & Costa, 1985; 1987). Rather, this study found that participants were more upset by the types of cyber-harassing behaviours they experienced and the number of behaviours experienced. This suggests that the methods used by perpetrators have particular importance in relation to the impact of their behaviour on their victim.

4.4.3 Perceived social support in dealing with cyber-harassment

Overall, participants reported that they would tell their friends or family if they experienced all of the cyber-harassing behaviours included in the survey. Previous research has focused on whether victims of cyber-harassment report their experiences to the police, or Internet service providers (Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005; Bocij, 2003) and has failed to take into consideration the support that victims may receive from their family or friends. The current research addresses this issue by illustrating that participants regard their friends and family as an important support network, if they were to experience cyber-harassment.

Despite this overall finding, there were marked gender differences in perceived social support when dealing with cyber-harassment. For the majority of behaviours, females were more likely than males to say that they would tell their friends or family. In contrast, males were more likely than females to say they would tell no-one. However, there were some exceptions as males were more likely than females to tell the police if they received abusive or threatening messages via mobile phone, or if someone told them in an online 'chat' that they had followed them offline.

Finn (2004) found that the most common reason for not reporting cyber-harassment was because victims did not consider the problem to be serious enough. It may be that males, more so than females, regard cyber-harassment as less of a threat. This explanation is supported by the finding that females were significantly more upset by their experiences of cyber-harassment than males. The exception to this finding is that males were more likely than females to report that they would tell the police if they received abusive/threatening messages to their mobile phone, or if someone told them in an online 'chat' that they had

followed them offline. This implies that males considered these behaviours to be more concerning, or more threatening than any other behaviour included in the survey.

4.4.4 Implications

In this study, the inclusion of threat included in cyber-harassing behaviours was used by participants when judging whether the behaviours were criminal. This may have serious implications on social policy. Perpetrators of harassment often engage in behaviours that are ambiguous (Draucker, 1999; Skoler, 1998) and vague, especially in regards to the perpetrator's intention. This ambiguity may be exaggerated in cases of cyber-harassment, as perpetrators may provide the defence that their behaviour was not intentionally threatening. Furthermore, perpetrators of cyber-harassment may not explicitly threaten their victims and if threat is involved, individuals may not perceive the threat as credible. Consequently, if perpetrators of cyber-harassment do not explicitly threaten their victims, the findings of this study suggest that individuals would not judge their behaviour as criminal. In court, this may result in perpetrators not being found guilty, and may perpetuate cyber-harassing instances. This study highlights a need to better educate individuals about cyber-harassment, the impact cyber-harassment can have on victims, and the legal consequences of engaging in cyber-harassing behaviours.

This study indicates that males and females suffer from cyber-harassing experiences to a similar degree. In particular, in comparison to offline harassment, males are more likely to report experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours. Furthermore, personality did not consistently predict the likelihood of experiencing cyber-harassment. This suggests that cyber-harassment may affect more individuals compared to offline harassment, regardless of personality characteristics or Internet self-efficacy. Therefore, this study highlights the need to increase personal protection and security whilst online, in an attempt to avoid experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours.

4.4.5 Limitations

The effect sizes relating to all the results found in this study were small. For example, the variance explained by personality and internet self-efficacy in predicting perceptions of

criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours was small. Personality and Internet self-efficacy do not fully explain perceptions of criminality and experiences of cyber-harassing behaviours. This highlights the need to look at other variables that may be important in influencing perceptions and experiences of cyber-harassing behaviours. For instance, ‘belief in a just world’ may be worthy of investigation.

The *PfHA* requires that a ‘course of conduct’ is required for harassment. When asked if behaviours were criminal, participants were given a list of single behaviours. Therefore, although some of the behaviours implied a course of conduct, the items may have been too ambiguous for participants to identify them as harassment. Providing participants with scenarios that depict cyber-harassment may be a more useful method for judging whether the perpetrator’s behaviour is criminal.

Linked to this, the checklist method was used to establish whether participants experienced cyber-harassing behaviours. Whilst some participants said they had experienced more than one of the behaviours, it is not known whether the behaviours were carried out by the same perpetrator. Therefore, the survey measured whether participants experienced potentially cyber-harassing behaviours, rather than whether they were truly victims of cyber-harassment.

4.4.6 Future Research

Although this study was useful in establishing the types of cyber-harassing behaviours experienced by undergraduate students, the behaviours provided to participants were vague and there is no information about how participants interpreted the items on the survey. For example, participants may report receiving malicious software but their experience may be due to downloading malicious software accidentally, rather than reporting a true cyber-harassing experience. In other words, whilst the study provides descriptive information, it cannot inform us about the lived experience of cyber-harassment. Therefore, future research would benefit from conducting qualitative research with cyber-harassed victims to fully explore their experience, and how they cope with their experience.

Furthermore, the study does not explore the impact that cyber-harassment has on individuals, and further research is required to explore this issue. For instance, there is little empirical research comparing the effects of cyber-harassment compared to offline harassment on victims. This research is necessary to establish whether cyber-harassment is qualitatively different in comparison to offline harassment, and to identify ways to help victims to cope with their experiences.

Chapter 5: Victims' Accounts of Their Experiences of Cyber-harassment

5.1 Introduction

Despite estimates suggesting the prevalence of cyber-harassment will increase, and surpass instances of offline harassment (Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005; Bocij, 2004; Finn, 2004; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002; Whitty & Carr, 2006; Wood & Wood, 2002), little is known about the phenomenon. This study set out to provide an understanding of how undergraduate students make sense of their experiences of cyber-harassment and aimed to explore the issues they identified as of importance when evaluating their experience.

To date, empirical research has focused on identifying the behaviours used by those engaging in cyber-harassment (see chapter 2: 'Nature and Extent of Cyberstalking'). With the exception of a few case studies (see Bocij, Griffiths & McFarlane, 2002; Bocij, Bocij, & McFarlane, 2003; Griffiths, Rogers & Sparrow, 1998), research has relied on surveys to quantify the behaviours used by cyber-harassers. Common behaviours experienced by victims include receiving threatening/abusive messages via email (Bocij, 2003; Jerin & Dolinsky, 2001; D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003), and via chat rooms or instant messenger, and receiving malicious software or attempted computer monitoring (Bocij, 2003). Whilst quantifying the behaviours used by cyber-harassers is useful, it is limited to the methods used by cyber-harassers identified in previous research. Given that the Internet evolves at a rapid pace, it is essential that researchers allow for new cyber-harassing methods to be identified. Furthermore, the behaviours listed in surveys can be vague and ambiguous. For example, receiving malicious software may simply be due to participants downloading software from an online, unknown source which is unlikely to be considered as cyber-harassment.

Surveys have also been the preferred method to measure the impact of cyber-harassment on victims. Bocij (2003) used rating scales to determine how distressed participants were by their cyber-harassing experiences. Sheridan and Grant (2007) provided participants with a checklist of a range of the different types of physical, emotional, social and financial effects that cyberstalking can have on victims. They found little difference between the impact of cyberstalking, compared to stalking, on victims. These studies provide a good

way of quantifying the impact of cyber-harassment, and both highlighted that cyber-harassment can impact on victims to the same extent as offline harassment on victims. However, they reduce the impact of cyber-harassment into a list of categories without providing rich accounts of victims' actual experiences that illustrate the complex and diverse nature of cyber-harassment. As quantitative methods have dominated research in this field, this study focuses on using qualitative methods to further understanding about the experiences of cyber-harassed victims and the impact of their experience on their online and offline lives.

Although cyber-harassment is a crime within the UK, research suggests that few victims report their experiences to the authorities (see Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005; Bocij, 2003). Common reasons for not reporting cyber-harassment have included not knowing who to report it to, and not considering cyber-harassment as serious enough to warrant police intervention (Finn, 2004). However, if people fail to report their experiences to the authorities the extent of the problem cannot be identified or acknowledged, and adequate help and support for victims cannot be provided. Consequently, this research will explore participants' perceived criminality of the perpetrators' behaviour, and their perceptions on reporting cyber-harassment to the police.

Despite some debate over the characteristics of cyber-harassed victims (see Chapter 2: 'Perpetrator and Victim Characteristics'), students have been identified as a vulnerable group who may be cyber-harassed or cyberstalked (Dutton & Helsper, 2007; Fremouw, Westrup & Pennypacker, 1997; Finn, 2004; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). Considering this, this study aimed to recruit undergraduate students who experienced behaviours associated with cyber-harassment.

Considering the commitment of this research to participants' subjective experience of cyber-harassment, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) will be used to analyse the data. Whilst IPA has roots in health psychology (e.g., Lavie & Willig, 2005; Mulveen & Hepworth, 2006; Seamark, Blake, Seamark & Haplin, 2004), it has also been used to investigate the emotional experience of anger (Eatough & Smith, 2006), aggressive behaviour among slot machine gamblers (Parke & Griffiths, 2005), addicts' experiences of treatment (Larkin & Griffiths, 2002), comparative experiences of ecstasy users and bungee

jumpers (Larkin & Griffiths, 2004), and the perpetrators' perspective of downloading and accessing child pornography (Winder & Gough, 2009). As Smith (1996) asserted, IPA is not restricted to health psychology. According to Smith (2004), IPA is useful for exploring issues that have previously been assessed using quantitative methods, and for the investigation of subjective experience (Lavie & Willig, 2005). Importantly, IPA is an idiographic method that Smith (2004) explains "explores in detail participants' personal lived experience and how participants make sense of that personal experience" (p. 40). Furthermore, IPA is flexible enough to keep the essence of individual experiences, whilst also highlighting similarities that victims may share in cases of cyber-harassment.

There are some features of IPA that distinguish this analytic procedure from thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is not tied to a theoretical framework and is a foundational method which increases accessibility for novice qualitative researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Brocki & Wearden, 2006). In contrast, IPA originates from an epistemological position as it is rooted in phenomenology and symbolic interactionism (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Smith, 1996). IPA places emphasis on what the participant says and the language they use (Chapman & Smith, 2002). Indeed, Smith and Osborn (2008) stipulate that a basic tenant of IPA is that there is a connection between how people talk, think and feel. Phenomenology is concerned with individuals' experiences of a phenomenon, and searches for convergence and divergence in individuals' accounts (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; Willig, 2001), whilst symbolic interactionism is concerned with the meanings individuals attach to a particular phenomenon (Smith, 1996). Thus, IPA focuses on the meanings individuals give to their lived experience of a phenomenon, rather than objectively focusing on the phenomenon itself. Hermeneutics is also an important focus of the analytical process, as the meaning of sentences can only be gained from close interpretation of individual words (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

In addition to the participants' experience, IPA takes into account the role of the researcher in the analytic process, making IPA a dual-natured approach. Smith (1996) notes that "research is a dynamic process...dependent on, and complicated by, the researcher's own conceptions" (p. 264). Whilst researchers are encouraged to be open and flexible during the research process, it is recognised that they cannot abandon their own assumptions and these need to be taken into consideration throughout the research process. In the analytic

phase of research, investigators check and re-check the data to ensure the findings are firmly in the data and not from the researchers' own assumptions. By doing so, researchers can attempt to limit their own interjection to the findings.

When designing the interview schedule, consideration must be given to the analytical methods as IPA and thematic analysis require different methods of data collection. When researchers intend to use thematic analysis, the interview schedule may be prescriptive with the use of prompts to guide the interview. In contrast, when using IPA, researchers are encouraged to view the interview schedule as a guide, with minimal use of prompts (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This allows interviewees more freedom to discuss their experiences in ways that are important to them.

When data collection is completed, the analytical process of IPA differs to the process used in thematic analysis. Thematic analysis does not require detailed transcription (Braun & Clarke, 2006), whereas IPA requires verbatim transcripts that include pauses, laughter, utterances, shouting, and non-verbal notes made by researcher (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The transcripts used in IPA are line-numbered in preparation for analysis.

Thematic analysis involves reading entire datasets and the coding of generic themes, and the coded extracts are grouped together in single data files (Braun & Clarke; 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Following this grouping of data, the themes are refined and named. IPA is conducted using individual cases rather than reading the entire data set (Smith, 1999). Within each participant's transcript, the researcher gains familiarity with the transcript by reading and re-reading the transcript. The analyst engages in a line by line interpretation of the text which involves interpretation of the meaning of words used in the construction of sentences. The left-hand margin of the page is used to make initial notes. The right-hand margin is used to develop the initial notes into themes and psychological concepts may be used at this stage. The themes identified in this latter stage are listed on a separate sheet of paper and are clustered and refined until superordinate and subordinate themes are identified, resulting in a master table of themes. When all transcripts have been analysed, the researcher begins to refine the themes across the dataset until a single master table of themes is produced. Essentially, IPA can be likened to a detailed thematic analysis which is conducted in a different way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, Warwick,

Joseph, Cordle and Ashworth (2004) compared thematic analysis to IPA on their data of individuals suffering chronic pain. They concluded the detailed analysis of IPA resulted in a different list of themes compared to their thematic analysis which they deemed as more informative.

This study utilises an online method of data collection that is appropriate given that the research focuses on an online phenomenon. IPA requires participants to articulate their thoughts and feelings about a phenomenon (Willig, 2001). Online research requires participants to verbalise their thoughts through written text and, therefore, places an additional demand on participants. Considering the demands placed on participants engaged in internet-mediated research (IMR), there may be concern that the data will not reach the depth required for IPA (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). However, Smith and Osborn (2008) note that written accounts (such as diaries) are suitable for IPA, and Mann and Stewart (2000) suggest that online communication is a hybrid between written and spoken language. In IMR, participants are allowed more time to reflect on questions, and their responses compared to face-to-face interviews. This makes the online interview a suitable method for IPA, given the assumed link between language and cognition.

In summary, the aims of this study were fourfold:

1. To provide rich, in-depth accounts of undergraduate students' experiences of behaviours associated with cyber-harassment, and the meanings they attached to their experiences.
2. To explore the impact of cyber-harassment on students' online and offline lives.
3. To further understanding how students coped with their cyber-harassing experience, and explore their evaluations of the help and support they received.
4. To identify whether students' perceived the cyber-harassers' behaviour as criminal, and explore their reasons for reporting/failing to report their experience to the police.

5.2 Method

5.2.1 Participants

Twelve undergraduate students from Nottingham Trent University participated in this study. Table 20 provides information about the participants, including the cyber-harassing behaviours they experienced, and who the perpetrator was. The sample consisted of eight females and four males, all were aged between 18 to 35 years ($M = 20.8$, $SD = 4.6$). All participants were volunteers and were not intended to form a representative sample of undergraduate students.

Table 20: Participants' Demographic Information for Study 2

Participants' pseudonyms	Age	Behaviours experienced	Prior relationship with instigator
David	21	- Numerous, unsolicited sexually explicit/obscene messages via Internet discussion boards	Stranger
Hannah	18	- Numerous, unsolicited abusive/threatening text messages	Ex-partner of participant's partner
Julia	19	- Received malicious software (keylogger)	Partner
Karen	18	- Numerous, unsolicited abusive/threatening messages via text messages	Online friend
Lisa	19	- Created a website pretending to be participant and posted false information about participant - Other Internet users encouraged to be abusive towards participant	University acquaintances
Jill	20	- Information posted online that participant did not disclose - Social networking profile hacked into - Contacted participants' friends and family via the Internet in an attempt to damage her reputation - False information posted on the Internet - Other Internet users encouraged to be abusive towards participant - Participants' contact information posted on the Internet in a way that solicited sex	Unknown
Beth	19	- Information posted online that participant did not disclose - Contacted participants' friends via the Internet and text messages in an attempt to damage her reputation	Ex-partner of participant's partner
Brendan	20	- Subscribed to unwanted online services	Friend/Company subscribed to
Simon	19	- Changed online identity to contact participant after previous contact attempts were blocked	Ex-partner
Ian	21	- Received sexually explicit/obscene text messages	Previously unknown company
Andrea	20	- Numerous unsolicited sexually explicit/obscene messages via the Internet	Strangers
Mary	35	- Numerous, unsolicited emails that were abusive/threatening - Contacted her friends, family and work colleagues via the Internet in an attempt to damage her reputation	Friend

- False information posted on the Internet
 - Instigator changed their online identity to contact participant after previous contact attempts were blocked
 - Other Internet users encouraged to be abusive/threatening towards participant
 - Told in via text messages that she had been followed offline
 - Numerous, unsolicited telephone calls
 - Followed to work
-

5.2.2 Measures

Online semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' experiences and perceptions of behaviours associated with cyber-harassment. Smith and Osborn (2008) suggest the semi-structured interview is the best way to gather data for IPA studies, and the interview schedule was created in accordance with their guidelines. Initially, the interview schedule consisted of too many questions and prompts which may have directed participants' answers. However, Smith and Osborn (2008) suggest that if the interviewer has to provide too many prompts, the data may not be suitable for IPA. They also suggest that prompts should only be prepared for questions that are potentially difficult. Work on the interview schedule was an iterative process that aimed to ask broader questions with less prompts, and continued on to the final version. As the research investigated a sensitive topic, care was taken with the ordering of questions to ensure that participants felt comfortable with disclosing their thoughts and feelings about the topic. The interview schedule comprised of four main sections:

1. Participants' thoughts and feelings about their cyber-harassing experiences.
2. The impact of their cyber-harassing experiences.
3. Coping with their experiences of cyber-harassment.
4. Perceptions about the legality of the perpetrator's behaviour.

5.2.3 Procedure

Study 1 of this thesis recruited undergraduate students to complete an online survey. At the end of that survey, participants were asked to provide their email address if they wished to participate in an online interview for this study. Fifty-two participants provided their email addresses and were emailed (including information about the study) in June 2009, inviting

them to take part in the interview. The recruitment emails were personalised, as much as possible, to maximise recruitment. This was achieved by sending individual emails that included participants' names (where possible) and detailed the behaviours associated with cyber-harassment that they reported experiencing during the online survey. All of the recruitment emails requested delivery notifications that indicated seven email addresses were bogus. Of the 45 remaining invitations that were deliverable, 12 individuals agreed to take part. When participants expressed further interest in participating, they were sent another email that provided a link to *SurveyMonkey* for them to provide informed consent. When participants provided their consent, they were contacted again to see whether they preferred to conduct the interviews via email or via *Instant Messenger* (IM), and their availability to take part in the interviews. Two participants chose to participate via email for convenience and because they had trouble with their Internet connections. The remaining ten participants participated via IM, which were arranged for a time to suit the participant.

Developing rapport is an essential part of the interview process as it can encourage the interviewee to be more open in their responses (Seymour, 2001). Considering the experiences that participants had with cyber-harassment and the research medium, establishing rapport was a crucial part of the research process. Madge and O'Connor (2002) recommend establishing rapport prior to online interviews as there is less time during the interview to do so. Therefore, care was taken to establish rapport with participants during the initial stages of contact. This was achieved by discussing upcoming exams, computer problems, interests and life events, shared experiences, and their university experiences.

The email interviews commenced immediately after participants provided their consent, and lasted between two to four weeks. In an attempt to reduce the length of the interviews, only a few questions were sent at a time. The IM interviews were conducted over a two week period, and lasted between 1.5 to 4.5 hours. It was intended that all interviews would last no longer than 1.5 hours. However, some participants requested a longer period of time to allow them to tell their story. Prior to, and immediately after the interviews, participants were asked if they still wanted to participate in the study, and were reminded of their right

to withdraw. Finally, participants were asked if they had any questions about the research, which were answered and participants were debriefed.

5.2.4 Analysis

Following data collection, the transcripts were prepared for analysis by transferring the data from *IM* chat logs to *Microsoft Word*. The font for all transcripts was changed to Times New Roman, size 12 with 1.5 line spacing, and the transcripts were fully anonymised. In this format, the transcripts ranged from 6-20 pages ($M = 11.7$; $SD = 4.6$).

Smith and Osborn (2008) produced guidelines that can be used for IPA, and these guidelines were followed when analysing the data from this study. The analysis of each participant's data was conducted in full before beginning analysis on the next case. This method of focusing on one case before another has been used in other research to maintain the idiographic nature of the research (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Table 21 describes the analytical process used for this study.

Table 21: Process used for analysis of data

Stage	Process
1	The first transcript was read several times before making notes. This was necessary to familiarise with the transcripts as the data was collected online, eliminating the transcription process.
2	Initial notes were made on the left-hand margin of the transcript. Notes included interesting descriptions of the participant's experience, how they described their experience, how they felt, and how they interpreted their experience. The participant's descriptions focused on the language used, sentence construction and the juxtaposition of concepts discussed. Time was spent interpreting ambiguous comments and meaning was ascribed to these comments after careful examination of contextual information. The notes also focused on the participant's questioning to determine whether the questions were rhetorical and who they were directed towards (the participant or the researcher). The participant's laughter, pauses and emoticons were considered in terms of when and why they occurred. Finally, prompts were examined to see why they were necessary, and the outcome of prompting.
3	The transcript was left for 1 day before it was re-read and the note-making process was continued. This step led to a more enlightened reading of the text and meanings became clearer. Connections between extracts within the transcript were made during this stage.

- 4 Focus was given to the notes made on the left-hand margin to link the notes made with psychological concepts. This stage was data-driven and the data was checked to ensure concepts were rooted in the data.
 - 5 The list of themes identified in Stage 4 was transferred onto a single sheet and were clustered. The clustered themes were given superordinate names, resulting in the creation of a master table of superordinate and subordinate themes.
 - 6 Stages 1 to 5 were repeated for the remaining 11 transcripts. This resulted in a master table of themes for each participant.
 - 7 The 12 master tables were read together and consolidated into a single master table of themes.
-

To begin, transcripts were read several times in full before comments were made in the left-hand margin. Upon making comments, the transcripts were left for a short period, after which they were re-read and additional comments made. This process continued until all relevant and interesting issues were identified. At this stage, the right-hand margin was used to identify theme titles. On a separate page, all theme titles were listed and connections were made between the themes and a master table of themes was created. Using the master tables created for each participant, a single master table was created. At this stage some themes converged with other themes, and some were abandoned because they lacked richness in the data. Using the single master table, each transcript was checked to ensure the themes emerged from the data. Anonymised transcripts were also distributed among the supervisory team and an IPA expert within the university to gain their perspective on the themes identified during the analysis to increase the validity of findings. Furthermore, participants were contacted to ensure the interpretations made reflected their experiences (Smith, 2000).

5.3 Results

Throughout this section, the *target* refers to the participant who was the target of cyber-harassing behaviours and the *instigator* refers to the person/group of people who carried out the cyber-harassing behaviours. When using IPA, excerpts of transcripts are verbatim and as such all spelling mistakes, abbreviations, and acronyms have been kept throughout this section. Table 21 shows the superordinate and subordinate themes that were identified during data analysis.

Table 22: Superordinate and subordinate themes of IPA analysis

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme
It's all virtual, nothing is face to face confrontational	The Fantasy Realm
	The Mentally Ill Perpetrator: "Psychos and Nutjobs"
	"It was something silly"
	Embodiment of Threat
PTSD-Like Symptoms	"I'm not sure"
	Re-experiencing the event
	Avoidance and emotional numbing

5.3.1 Superordinate Theme 1: It's all virtual, nothing is face to face confrontational

'It's all virtual, nothing is face to face confrontational' was the first superordinate theme identified in this study. The subordinate themes that comprised this theme included 'the fantasy realm', 'the mentally ill perpetrator: "Psychos & Nutjobs"', 'it was something silly', 'embodiment of threat', and 'I'm not sure'. The overarching nature of this theme highlighted participants' perceptions of the 'real' and 'not real' discrepancy between their offline and online worlds.

5.3.1.2 The Fantasy Realm

Three participants discussed the Internet as a place in which they could create different identities that could be used to explore their own identity. In this respect, the internet was perceived as a fantasy realm that emphasised that experiences whilst online are 'not real'.

The internet does allow for it, I mean on the internet u can spend hours and hours on to a certain extent u can do whatever you want or say whatever you want on the internet perhaps sides of u [you] u [you] wouldn't want to display in the real world. **Andrea**

According to Andrea, aspects of the Internet, in conjunction with temporal displacement whilst online, produce the optimal environmental conditions for the creation of different identities, and identity play that individuals would not 'want to display in the real world'. Andrea's emphasis on the 'real world' emphasised the perceived difference of reality between the online and offline worlds. Karen also agreed with Andrea's perception as she said 'you can easily reinvent yourself on the Internet'. This illustrated one of the perceived positive aspects of the Internet that allows individuals the freedom to be creative and explore aspects of their identity. In this respect, participants' perceptions of the Internet

mirrored Turkle's (1995) utopian view of the Internet, as she argued the Internet provides users with the freedom to discover their true selves. However, participants explained how their online experiences could become negative.

Guys always used to start conversations up with you...just really inappropriately...like the standard questions that you'd get a/s/l? [age/sex/location] followed by what do you look like? What size are you? Etc. And then they'd try starting up "cyber sex" I guess...I've been sent dodgy pictures of naked guys too...I don't think it's necessarily because of anything I did I think they probably did it to everyone they thought was a girl. **Andrea**

For instance, Andrea described situations that involved her 'chatting' to males online, who began their chats with asking benign questions considered as 'standard'. However, the males she referred to soon attempted to engage her in cybersex, which she perceived as inappropriate. In conjunction with text-based attempts to engage her in cybersex, males also sent her naked images. Importantly, Andrea attributed their behaviour to their belief that they were communicating with a female. This attribution demonstrated Andrea's acknowledgement that other Internet users could engage in fantasy by imagining their communicative partner was of the desired gender, and they would use this fantasy for their own sexual gratification. The creation of fantasy of communicative partners cannot occur in offline environments. However, the lack of non-verbal cues available in online interactions allows individuals to engage in fantasies about their communicative partners.

The internet for me has always been my safe place. It sounds really sad but I'm more confident online, I feel like I can be myself and I felt they broke all that which is probably why I got so angry at first. **Jill**

Whilst Andrea and Karen acknowledged the creation of different identities as a possibility in the fantasy realm, Jill perceived the Internet as a safe haven where she could explore and display aspects of her true self that she felt unable to display in the real world. However, she perceived her cyber-harassing experiences as the destruction of her 'safe place', which manifested in anger.

5.3.1.3 The Mentally Ill Perpetrator: "Psychos and Nutjobs"

In contrast to the fantasy realm, participants described the instigators of cyber-harassment

as ‘psychos’ and ‘nutjobs’ in the ‘real world’. When recalling her cyber-harassing experience, Julia responded ‘Ohhh I remember now the psycho ex installed a keylogger!’

U hear about the psychos that are on the Internet and the desperate ones that just sit at their computers all day long and that u kind of know they are just using you to get themselves off...Like u hear stories of people that have “fallen in love” etc on the internet and they turn out to be a nutjob...Why are you online trying to have sex, is it cause u can’t get any in the real world!? **Andrea**

As Andrea described, people who engage in sexual harassment whilst online are likely to be ‘psychos’ or ‘desperate’ in the ‘real world’. Andrea’s comments alluded to the idealisation of online partners, who individuals can fall in love with. When meeting a person offline, the illusion created of an online partner can be shattered, as perceptions about the person created offline can destroy any fantasy created whilst online about who the person is. This description further illustrated the dichotomy of the online, fantasy realm and the offline, ‘real’ world.

She was mad about me, and didn’t want to let go...help should be provided for people like my ex, who don’t want it to be over, but can’t be with the person they broke up with. **Simon**

Whilst Andrea described cyber-harassing experiences with strangers, eight participants knew the person who was harassing them. The creation of fantasy about an online partner may be more difficult as they are known in the ‘real world’. However, four participants indicated they perceived the instigator as in need of help, suggesting they were also seen as ‘nutjobs’ or ‘psychos’. In describing an ex-partner who used the Internet to re-establish a relationship that Simon perceived as ‘dead’, Simon stated that his ex-partner was ‘mad about’ him. Whilst he later clarified that he meant that she was in love with him, the language he used portrayed the instigator as in need of professional help for psychological problems. Similarly, Beth stated ‘I think, without sounding harsh, I think she needs help’, and more specifically, Karen thought the instigator was ‘slightly obsessed’. Thus, participants’ thought that cyber-harassing instigators had psychological problems and the Internet allowed them the freedom to act out and portray sides of their personality that they would not display in the ‘real world’.

5.3.1.4 *“It was something silly”*

As cyber-harassment occurs in a virtual reality, eight participants discussed their experiences in terms of the instigators’ humour. Whilst participants considered that the instigator may have intended to play a joke on them, the instigator’s intention did not determine how they felt about the experience.

It was another practical joke but i thought it was quite disturbing and distressing...Although it was meant as a practical joke, I wasn’t really happy about this incident. **Brendan**

Brendan explained that the instigator’s intention was not malicious and did not intend to cause him harm. Despite the intention, Brendan felt disturbed and distressed by his experience. The view that the instigator’s behaviour may not be maliciously intended was shared by other participants.

Y’know silly things like one person will say something stupid, the next guy will say “fuck you” then someone else says “i fucked your mum”...people don’t really care when there’s anonymity and ultimately people find it funny? Well, that’s what I think...I don’t know the people anyway...it’s just a form of humour like any other. **David**

For instance, David perceived that abusive and threatening messages were common among online interactions in forums, and were not intended to be malicious. Unlike Brendan, David was not upset by his experiences, as he explained that anonymity was an important factor in accepting the humour intended in online communication. As David did not know the people who sent him harassing messages, he perceived their behaviour as ‘a form of entertainment’.

Whilst Brendan and David perceived the instigators’ intention as being non-malicious, or joking with them, other participants believed the instigators had malicious intentions but they perceived the instigators’ behaviour as stupid or silly.

It was all a bit stupid but done to be insulting...They [parents] probably would have taken it seriously and wanted to have reported it and I just didn’t see it in that way. It wasn’t something I wanted them to worry

about...it was something silly and something i could sort out on my own. I didn't take it very seriously. **Lisa**

The instigators of Lisa's cyber-harassing experience were perceived to have malicious intentions as their behaviour was intended 'to be insulting'. Despite their intention, Lisa perceived their behaviour as 'silly'. As she believed they were being silly, she did not want to tell her parents about her experiences as she thought they would perceive it as more serious and perhaps report it to the police.

Because I was ignoring her she text me saying if you don't talk to me I'll find where you are and make you talk...I just laughed at it...I just thought it was a bit ridiculous...I was joking with a friend that I had a stalker. **Karen**

Similarly, Karen perceived the instigator's behaviour as funny, despite the veiled threat behind the instigator saying she would 'find where you are and make you talk'. Interestingly, Karen joked that she had a stalker, indicating an awareness of the harassing nature of the instigator's behaviour. Karen's transcript also alluded to her perception that stalkers are humorous. Karen was not the only participant to perceive threatening behaviour as non-threatening, as Hannah shared Karen's outlook.

I thought they were well funny, thought that the girls texting me were absolutely pathetic the fact that they had to text me but couldn't say it to my face...they'd be more than welcome to say it to my face ☺ It would've shown more courage. **Hannah**

Whilst Karen did not elaborate as to why she perceived the instigator's behaviour as non-threatening and humorous, Hannah explained that the behaviour was not perceived as threatening because of the lack of social presence of the instigator reduced the credibility of threats made. According to Hannah, the instigators' behaviour was 'pathetic' and lacked courage. Hannah elaborated further that 'it's very easy to say stuff behind a mobile phone, you don't get to see/feel the brunt of anyone's retaliation'. Hannah perceived the lack of social presence of the instigators as reducing the credibility of threats, emphasising the instigators were hiding behind a barrier of technology and did not intend to carry out their threats. Furthermore, instigators were perceived to choose cyberspace to threaten individuals because they were afraid of their victim retaliating against them. The perception that threats made via the Internet or mobile phones lack credibility further

demonstrated that participants did not perceive threatening behaviour as real because it occurred in cyberspace.

The perception that online behaviours could be construed as a joke or something funny and not serious extended to their perceptions about the criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours. For instance, Brendan attributed his cyber-harassing experience to a practical joke played on him by a school friend. Despite Brendan feeling 'disturbed' by his experience, he stated 'it was a prank rather than a breach of the law...as a prank you don't see it as illegal'. Furthermore, both Andrea and Hannah expressed concern that the instigator of cyber-harassment could defend their behaviour by saying it was intended to as a joke.

If you're not with the person there's always the chance of them messing around or joking. **Andrea**

It's so easy to misread a text...she could turn around and say it was a joke.
Hannah

The lack of social presence of the instigator was central to Hannah and Andrea's concerns regarding possible defences to the behaviour. As the instigator is not present, participants considered that the intention of the instigator's behaviour could be misconstrued because they are relying on their interpretation of text-based communication. Thus, the lack of non-verbal communication increased concerns that participants' interpretation of cyber-harassment may not reflect the real world intentions of the instigators.

5.3.1.5 Embodiment of Threat

Contrasting the perception that cyber-harassing experiences are not real, two participants feared that perceived threats would become embodied, and this caused them distress.

Even though I'd moved back home which was miles away from everyone I'd be terrified they'd find me...Knowing that they all had my number and email address and even knew roughly where I was made me think I wasn't safe...particularly because I knew one of them could be violent. **Jill**

Despite the real world geographical distance Jill perceived between herself and the instigators of cyber-harassment, she feared the instigators would find her. Whilst Jill knew the instigators offline, her language indicated that they did not know where she lived as she was ‘terrified they’d find’ her. However, knowledge about the violent capabilities of one of the instigators increased her belief that she was not safe.

I’d really panic. My heart beat would like speed up, and I’d start shaking...I’d heard that he’d beaten up one of his ex’s. **Beth**

Similar to Jill, Beth explained that prior knowledge of the instigator’s violent capabilities contributed to her fear of the embodiment of perceived threat. Interestingly, Beth and Jill were not explicitly threatened by their cyber-harassing instigators. This is interesting as it directly contrasts the perceptions of other participants who were threatened but did not interpret the instigators’ behaviour in this manner.

5.3.1.6 “I’m not sure”

As cyber-harassment occurs in a virtual world, participants did not know how to deal with their experience but did consider offline methods of harassment as more serious and easier to define. Furthermore, participants did not perceive the instigators’ behaviour as criminal.

I don’t see throwaway comments made anonymously via the Internet as harassment. It’d be if I kept getting calls and what have you that’d piss me off. **David**

David was the only participant who held clear views that cyber-harassing behaviours were not truly harassing. He received sexually explicit messages via the Internet, which he described as ‘throwaway comments’. For David, the communication method was important in determining whether communication could be considered as harassing, rather than the message content. Messages sent anonymously via the Internet did not constitute harassment. However, David considered that telephone calls were more serious as messages received via this method would have a greater impact on him. However, other participants struggled with their judgements about the criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours.

[I'm] not sure if it was illegal so I didn't report it to the authorities...If I was to stumble across something definitely illegal I would most certainly report it to the police. **Brendan**

For instance, Brendan's comments illustrated the confusion felt regarding the criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours. Brendan explained that he was unsure whether his cyber-harassing experiences were illegal and did not report it to the police because of his uncertainty. This uncertainty was shared by other participants. When considering the criminality of her cyber-harassing experience, Beth explained:

Beth: Urm, yeah I think so. I'm not really sure.

Interviewer: Ok. Why would you say it was harassment?

Beth: Because of the persistence.

Interviewer: Ok, and why would you say it wasn't harassment?

Beth: Urm, because it's all virtual, nothing's face to face confrontational.

Beth's transcript encapsulated the essence of the confusion expressed by participants when they considered the criminality of their cyber-harassing experiences. Beth's comments illustrated that cyber-harassment is equated to the experience of offline harassment, and was essentially the same. However, the cyber-harassing experience is perceived as not being real because it happened in a virtual reality. In contrast, if the instigators used offline methods of harassment, it would be considered as more tangible and represented the true form of harassment.

5.3.2 Superordinate Theme 2: PTSD-Like Symptoms

Despite the dichotomy in participants' views of their offline and online worlds, the real and the not real, participants reported psychological symptoms that they directly attributed to their cyber-harassing experiences. Many of the symptoms that participants reported experiencing due to their experiences of cyber-harassment appeared to fall along the spectrum of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR), there are two criteria for PTSD and both of the criteria must be met in order for a diagnosis of PTSD (APA, 2000). The first criterion involves exposure to a traumatic event that involves a serious injury or threat to one's physical integrity. The second criterion is that it caused the victim intense fear, helplessness, or horror. However, this study did not measure PTSD among participants but

the symptoms described fell along the PTSD spectrum. A further caveat is that not all participants reported that their experience negatively impacted on them, and this section focuses only on participants who felt their experience had a negative impact on them.

5.3.2.1 Re-experiencing the event

PTSD-like symptoms include re-experiencing the event, with nightmares, intrusive upsetting memories, and intense physical reactions to reminders of the event falling in this category.

I started having nightmares that I wasn't good enough or that I was gonna see her in town and she was gonna hit me or something...I then started having dreams that his mates, and his family all kinda turned on me and said I was a compulsive liar, and that I'd ruined his life and he'd be better off without me, he's just too blind to see it...I also had a nightmare that she came to his house and started hitting me and beating me up and that, after taking me to a & e my partner turned and said 'you cause too much trouble for me – its over'. **Beth**

I felt bad 'cause we were having a really nice day out, with loads of photos and stuff, and I just couldn't forget it and have fun. **Beth**

I'd walk to school/college and every time I saw a blue Peugeot 106 (that's the car he had) I'd really panic...my heart beat would like speed up, and [I'd] start shaking. **Beth**

For Beth, re-experiencing cyber-harassment invaded her when she was awake through rumination, and when she was asleep through her dreams. Importantly for Beth, the nightmares she described as having, were not a one-off occurrence. She clearly remembers at least three nightmares that all magnify her fears about the impact the harassment might have on her, and her relationship with others, in particular her boyfriend. Expressed in her nightmares is the fear of being confronted by the instigator, whom she assumed would harm her physically to the extent of hospitalisation. The instigator was the ex-girlfriend of Beth's boyfriend. The instigator targeted Beth to try and 'break us up'. Despite the instigator's connection with Beth's boyfriend, Beth's dreams implied she was worried that her partner would blame her for the harassment.

The thoughts described by Beth, clearly resemble rumination which has been associated with depression and anxiety (Mor & Winquist, 2002). According to Nolen-Hoeksema, Morrow and Fredrickson (1993), rumination involves self-focused thoughts on, and the causes of, one's negative mood. For Beth, ruminating has a debilitating effect on her social life as she could not 'forget it and have fun', and based on Nolen-Hoeksema et al.'s findings, may highlight underlying psychological issues.

5.3.2.2 Avoidance and Emotional Numbing

Feeling socially isolated, feeling detached from others, and the loss of interest in activities and life in general, are symptoms reported by participants that resemble PTSD symptoms. All participants who still felt affected by their experience of cyber-harassment reported they felt socially isolated.

A few people phased me out blanking me and making it so I couldn't hang out with my friends if they were there...I was very withdrawn and always on my own. **Jill**

For Jill, social isolation was a consequence of others' reactions to her following her experience. This resulted from the instigator contacting her friends and successfully damaging her reputation.

Mary also reported that she felt socially isolated. Unlike Jill, Mary reported that social isolation was self-imposed as she reported 'I changed the way that I socialised'. Regardless of whether social isolation was self imposed or imposed by others, participants reported that social isolation impacted on their self-perceptions and was hard to adjust to:

Like a puff of smoke everyone had vanished! The house was empty and it was very hard to adjust to that... There is a massive part of me that longs for the social network I used to have and yet now I struggle to think of people to ring for a pint on a Friday night. **Mary**

For those who were severely impacted by their experience of cyber-harassment, feeling socially isolated was associated with reports of depression and loss of interest in activities and life in general.

I suffered with depression before i came to uni and I've been in counselling all three years I've been here so when it [cyber-harassment] all happened it just made me feel worse. Particularly because my boyfriend had finished his exams and had moved home I didn't have anyone else and it [cyber-harassment] made me turn to things I'm not proud of...[Like] cutting myself. I struggled with it through college and really wanted to stop. I think at the time I'd stopped for about 3 months but it just sent me straight back. **Jill**

Jill's depression was exacerbated by cyber-harassment and was entangled with her feelings of social isolation. Although she reported self-harm behaviours prior to her experience, she had stopped self-harming for three months prior to being cyber-harassed. Jill was ashamed of her self-harming behaviour, and stopping for three months was an achievement. However, her experiencing of cyber-harassment was perceived to be a set-back to her progress.

I did get depressed about it...I used to be very down and feel very sad that I didn't have [the perpetrator] in my life anymore...it used to make me cry when I thought about how much I liked her. When I was depressed I felt nearly fraudulent about attributing my lowness to that broken trust element of those relationships. **Mary**

Whilst Jill reported that cyber-harassment exacerbated her depression, Mary reported cyber-harassment was the primary cause of the onset of depression. For Mary, depression was entangled with losing her friendship with the instigator, and resembled a form of grief. Mary also associated her feelings of depression with changes in her personality and behaviour:

I can't be bothered with entertaining friends to the same extent that I used to cos I just think there's no point anymore...I can't really be bothered making deep dug friends...I haven't made much effort in friendships with people at uni either...I was always sparky before and so full of energy, and I just seemed to be very bored with it all suddenly...I was putting so much effort on the business and same effort in personal life and got shit on big time and couldn't see the point. **Mary**

From the extract above, it is clear that Mary felt greatly impacted by her experience as it affected her social life. Throughout this extract, Mary's language emphasised the degree to which she perceived her life to change, and attributed this change to her experience of cyber-harassment. Mary reported that her dedication to her work life was reduced also as 'I

was self-employed and that means going out to find clients, and I'd keep putting it off because I was so worn out and felt low'. Several studies have found that offline stalking victims have reduced social outings, lost days at work, changed work, or stopped work, and have avoided places and people (e.g., Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Pathé & Mullen, 1997; Purcell, Pathé & Mullen, 2004; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The impact of cyber-harassment was, for this participant, as severe as the impact reported by victims of offline harassment.

5.4 Discussion

Whilst previous studies have typically focused on the types of behaviours experienced, and the impact of those experiences, on victims of cyber-harassment (e.g., Bocij, 2003; Sheridan & Grant, 2007), this study sought to explore how victims make sense of their experience. Following semi-structured, online interviews with 12 participants who experienced behaviours associated with cyber-harassment, two superordinate themes were identified. The superordinate themes were *'It's all virtual, nothing is face to face confrontational'* and *'PTSD-Like Symptoms'*. Although participants reported experiencing similar methods used in campaigns of cyber-harassment, participants' experiences were not identical and variations were found in the meanings participants attached to their experiences.

Participants shared Turkle's (1995) view that cyberspace could be a place where individuals are free to explore their identity and aspects of their true selves. For instance, one participant perceived cyberspace as her safe haven, where she could be more confident. However, participants explained that other Internet users could also use the internet to play out fantasies, particularly in the case of online sexual harassment. In contrast to participants' perceptions of cyber-space, they described instigators of cyber-harassment as 'psychos and nutjobs' in the real, offline world. According to some participants, in reality, instigators of online sexual harassment were unlikely to be able to initiate relationships offline, which is why they try to engage Internet users in instances of cybersex. This perception of perpetrators of cyber-harassment mirrors Diermenjian's (1999) definition of a cyberstalker as a 'disturbed loner who seeks attention and companionship in cyberspace' (p. 410). However, this perception may relate specifically to strangers who sexually harass other Internet users. The perception that instigators of cyber-harassment are 'psychos and nutjobs' in the 'real world' highlighted the distinction participants perceived between the online (not real) and the offline (real) worlds.

One of the most concerning findings of this study was the perception that cyber-harassing experiences were perceived as 'something silly'. Some participants believed the instigator of cyber-harassment to have intended for their behaviour to be humorous. One participant in particular commented that cyber-harassing behaviours were not harassing but were a

form of entertainment. In other cases, the instigator's intentions were perceived as malicious but the lack of social presence reduced the credibility of threats made. In these instances, participants perceived the instigator(s) as pathetic, lacking courage, and as a joke. Furthermore, the perception that cyber-harassment is 'something silly' extended to participants' judgements about the criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours. Participants were not sure that online behaviours could be considered as harassment because they did not involve face-to-face confrontation. In this respect, the virtual nature of the behaviours rendered the behaviours as 'not real'. This lends further support to the findings of Alexy, Burgess, Baker and Smoyak (2005) who reported in an online survey that seven percent of participants did not label a vignette depicting a case of involving severe cyber-harassment, as harassment. Furthermore, Alexy et al. reported that cyber-harassed victims were less likely than non-victims to perceive the vignette as harassment.

The perception that cyber-harassment is 'not real' may be a consequence of disembodiment whilst in cyberspace. According to Kang (2007), disembodiment refers to the 'transcendence of body constraints in cyberspace' (p. 475). Feelings of disembodiment are created by the lack of social presence and non-verbal cues available in online communication. Niedenthal, Barsalou, Winkielman, Krauth-Gruber and Ric (2005) explain the presentation of environmental stimuli activates schemas that are used to cognitively process environmental information and relates to real-world experiences. The knowledge held within schemas help to form actions in relation to the environmental schema, which informs behaviour. Whilst online, cognitive processing of environmental stimuli becomes decoupled from offline experiences. Furthermore, whilst online, individuals are free from non-verbal cues and become immersed in the textual information available to them. The lack of non-verbal cues contributes to a disembodied state and contributes to feelings that online experiences are 'not real'.

Disembodiment may also account for individual differences in the impact of cyber-harassing experiences. In this current study, participants who were not specifically threatened feared the embodiment of physical threat posed by the instigators of cyber-harassment. Hartmann and Vorderer (2010) suggest that individuals automatically perceive their experiences as 'real'. Although individuals are disembodied whilst online, they strive to imagine the real person behind computer-mediated communication (Niedenthal et al.,

2005). Thus, thinking about the possibility of being physically attacked produces an embodied state. Hence, explaining those individuals who felt threatened by the instigator of cyber-harassment despite the lack of explicit threats.

In contrast, participants who were explicitly threatened by the instigator of cyber-harassment did not perceive the threats to be credible, aligning their experience with the 'not real'. Hartmann and Vorderer (2010) explain that motivational effort is required for individuals to remind themselves that online experiences are not real, and this can lead to detachment from the experience. In the current study, participants who were explicitly threatened had increased motivation to remind themselves that online experiences are not real because they occur in cyberspace. By doing so, participants who were explicitly threatened protected themselves from the fear that can be aroused by threats of physical harm.

In some instances, participants reported that cyber-harassment had an adverse and pervasive impact on their online and offline lives, and reported symptoms appeared to fall along the post-traumatic stress spectrum. At present, there are no empirical studies that have investigated post-traumatic stress symptomology among victims of cyber-harassment. However, Milkelsen and Einarsen (2002) investigated post-traumatic stress disorder among 118 victims of workplace bullying. Less than one third of participants fulfilled both of the DSM-IV-TR criteria for PTSD. However, 76% of participants reported PTSD symptoms that moderately to severely impaired their daily functioning. Similarly, participants in this study who reported that cyber-harassment produced PTSD-like symptoms failed to meet the first of the diagnostic criteria. However, their lifestyles and daily functioning had been detrimentally affected by cyber-harassment. If accepted that some of the participants may have had PTSD-like symptoms, this study lends some support to the empirical research conducted by Sheridan and Grant (2007). The researchers found no difference in the impact of cyberstalking on victims compared to offline stalking on victims. This highlights that whilst cyber-harassment occurs in a virtual world, the impact can have severe consequences on victims' online and offline lives. However, as PTSD was not assessed using a standardised test, further research would be beneficial to determine the extent of PTSD symptoms prevalent among victims of cyber-harassment.

Conducting IPA requires patience on the researcher's part to allow participants to tell their own story, without interjection. This is especially relevant when conducting online interviews as the lack of visual cues leave the researcher unable to ascertain whether the participant has finished answering questions during the interview process. Using *Instant Messaging* software was useful for this as the chat window allows the researcher to see when the participant has finished typing. When the chat window showed a participant had finished typing, the researcher continued to ask a question. On occasion, this appeared to interrupt the participant's thought processes and prematurely ended some participants' responses. To overcome this, researchers need to be more patient to ensure participants are finished their responses when conducting interviews online. As the researcher became more experienced with online interviewing, such instances occurred less frequently.

In conjunction with allowing participants the time to tell their story, IPA requires rich, in-depth data. To maximise participation, this study conducted interviews via email and instant messenger (IM). Madge and O'Connor (2002) suggest that asynchronous interviewing allows participants time to reflect and formulate their responses to questions asked during online interviews. However, the two email interviews conducted in this study produced less rich data than the interviews conducted via IM, an observation reported in other studies (e.g., Hussain & Griffiths, 2009). The data gathered for IM interviews were more detailed, and the responses were more naturalistic and less formal than the data gathered from email interviews.

IPA acknowledges that the researcher cannot be free from their own pre-conceptions and interpretations of the data (Smith, 1996). During the interviews, the researcher's conceptions and technological naivety may have influenced how participants' experiences were interpreted. For example, the researcher initially thought that creating a website involved technological skill. Whilst concerned with reducing the impact of the researcher's pre-conceptions, there was also concern that addressing issues would influence participants' responses during the interview. Consequently, such issues were addressed at the end of the interview. This was important as misinterpreting participants' experiences in fundamental ways may have changed the findings of the data.

Initially, the lack of visual cues caused concern about conducting online interviews with participants about a sensitive topic. Researchers are ethically bound to ensure participants are comfortable and are not distressed during the interview. This was achieved during the interview, and prior to the interview participants were asked how they felt about the interview. Several participants commented that the interview process was therapeutic and commented that having someone to listen to them was beneficial.

Disengaging from some participants after they had taken part in the interviews proved difficult in some cases. This was particularly evident in cases whereby participants reported that their experiences of cyber-harassment had a detrimental affect on their social lives. The research medium made it easier for participants to contact the researcher after they had taken part in the study. When logged onto *IM* to conduct other interviews, participants who had taken part in interviews previously and who were logged into *IM*, took the opportunity to begin a conversation with the researcher, presenting the researcher with some difficulties. First, the researcher's attention was momentarily diverted from the current interview to read and respond to contact attempts. Second, considering the research topic and the therapeutic nature of the interviews as reported by participants, the researcher did not want participants to suffer further negative online experiences by ignoring their contact attempts. As a researcher, there was a need to maintain the professional relationship with the participants. However, knowledge of participants' feelings of mistrust, depression and social isolation following their cyber-harassing experiences meant that care had to be taken when ending the relationship.

Disengagement from these participants was managed using several strategies, and in some cases was a lengthy process. In order to fully attend to the current interview, the researcher explained to previous participants that an interview was taking place and arranged to 'chat' with the person after the interview. Following the interview, the researcher made time to 'chat' with previous interviewees. In some instances, the researcher explained that she was not a counsellor and directed participants to the counselling services at Nottingham Trent University. In conjunction with directing participants to counselling services, the researcher kept an open policy with regards to contact from participants. This was deemed necessary to ensure participants did not resent participating in the study and it was hoped

that participants would not consider the online interview as a negative experience. All participants naturally disengaged from the researcher over a period of two months.

5.4.1 Implications

This study highlights a need to better educate people about cyber-harassment; what constitutes cyber-harassment, how to cope with cyber-harassment, and who to approach for help if faced with cyber-harassment. Providing people with different examples of cyber-harassment and cyber-ORI, and illustrating how the instigator's behaviour may escalate, may help individuals identify and prevent circumstances in their online interactions that may potentially lead to cyber-harassment. By raising awareness and educating people about issues surrounding cyber-harassment, individuals can better protect themselves against vulnerability to experiencing cyber-harassment. If faced with cyber-harassment, victims will be better able to cope with their experiences, know who to report it to, and receive more adequate support in dealing with their experiences.

Although further research is required to determine the extent to which cyber-harassed victims experience PTSD-like symptoms, the findings in this study suggest that treatment offered to those severely impacted by cyber-harassment may be similar to those treated for PTSD. This would be particularly relevant to clinicians and general practitioners who may be contacted by victims of cyber-harassment.

Future researchers who wish to conduct online interviews need to consider their processes of disengagement from participants, particularly if they intend to investigate sensitive issues. Researchers need to consider how they will end their relationship with participants whilst adhering to their moral and ethical code.

5.4.2 Limitations

A limitation of this study may have been analysing data collected online using IPA. This is because rich, in-depth data is required to fulfil the aim of IPA to explore, in-depth, participants' lived experience of a phenomenon (Smith, 2004). Whilst involved in an online interview, extra demands are placed on participants as they have to read and

interpret questions, formulate and type their responses. These extra demands on participants may have yielded less rich data. Furthermore, the researcher found during data collection that a greater degree of probing was required to fully explore the meanings participants attached to their experiences. This contravenes Smith and Osborn's (2008) caveat that too many prompts may render data unsuitable for IPA. In part, the effects of the medium used to gather data and the higher degree of probing was evident in amount of superordinate themes that emerged from the data. However, care was taken with the interview schedule prior to data collection, and questions were in accordance to Smith and Osborn's guidelines. During data collection, the researcher aspired to ensure that interviews did not exceed 1.5 hours in an attempt to minimise fatigue experienced by participants. However, participants were enthusiastic in telling their story, and often requested a longer period of time for the interview to tell their story in greater depth. For instance, one participant's interview lasted 4.5 hours, during which the researcher's probes were minimal. The data yielded was rich and in-depth, and suited to IPA. Whilst Smith and Osborn caution over the amount of probes used, their guidelines apply to research conducted in face-to-face settings. If IPA researchers wish to use online methods of data collection, probes are required to gather in-depth data and to increase social presence. By doing so, researchers can re-assure participants that their story is interesting to the researcher and increases self-disclosure. With thorough preparation prior to data collection, online methods of data collection are suited to IPA.

Due to the retrospective design of the study, participants' recall may have been influenced by memory biases. Memory biases may have been further confounded among participants who reported PTSD-like symptoms, and the research medium. Memory biases have been found among samples which have included participants suffering from PTSD. For example, in a matched participants design, Paunovic, Lundh and Oest (2002) found that crime victims suffering from acute PTSD showed longer response latency in a stroop task for trauma related words compared to controls. This effect was not found for non-threatening words. In the current study, the research medium may have produced memory biases if participants who reported PTSD-like symptoms perceived the research medium as threatening as a consequence of their experiences of cyber-harassment.

As IPA is an idiographic approach, it is concerned with individuals' perceptions of their experiences but does not attempt to explain why individuals differ in their perceptions (Willig, 2001). Participants initially participated in an online survey and indicated during the survey the types of cyber-harassing behaviours they had experienced. At this initial stage, participants' experiences may have appeared similar. However, the interviews highlighted that participants varied in their experiences, and the meaning they attached to those experiences. However, the research does not explain the mechanisms by which individuals differ when interpreting their cyber-harassing experiences.

Participants in this study did not define themselves as victims and this may impact on the perceived criminality of cyber-harassment. Whilst some of the participants experienced cyber-harassment, not all participants' experiences can be described as cyber-harassment. As such, they were unlikely to describe the perpetrator's behaviour as criminal. This may have biased the research findings. In addition, self-defined victims may be more aware of anti-harassment legislation in the UK.

5.4.3 Future Research

Researchers are not immune to the effects of computer-mediated communication. However, little research has been conducted on researchers' experiences in conducting online interviews, and the effects the research medium on their interpretations of data collected. As the Internet continues to evolve, and as researchers increasingly turn to online methods of data collection, future research would be beneficial in exploring the effects of the research medium on the researchers' interpretations. Such effects include the effect of uninhibited behaviour, disembodiment, and self-disclosure whilst conducting online interviews and these effects may be different when conducting research via email compared to via IM. For example, in this study, the researcher found that greater self-disclosure was required for email interviews compared to IM interviews to encourage participants' disclosure. Furthermore, increased self-disclosure was required during IM interviews to re-assure participants that they were not being judged by the researcher. Whilst self-disclosure is necessary to establish rapport and make participants feel comfortable when discussing sensitive issues, researchers' disclosure directly involves researchers in the interview process, and may create bias when interpreting findings.

Conducting research in this area will provide researchers with clearer guidelines on how to conduct research using online methods, without compromising the validity of research gathered.

The current research has provided some insight to the meaning-making processes among individuals who experience potentially cyber-harassing behaviours. As IPA is an idiographic approach, it is not concerned with the generalisability of findings. However, in keeping with the mixed methods approach to conducting research, future research would be beneficial in further exploration of cyber-harassed victims' experiences. For instance, quantitative research could measure the effects of disembodiment in perceptions of the credibility of threats made online.

The findings of the current research suggest that cyber-harassed victims who felt affected by their experiences reported symptoms that appeared to fall along the PTSD spectrum. Future research would be beneficial in measuring PTSD symptoms, using a standardised measure, among victims of cyber-harassment to further substantiate this finding.

Furthermore, social isolation was one of the more prevalent symptoms reported by participants following their cyber-harassing experience. Social isolation was often accompanied by symptoms of depression. The social support available to victims of cyber-harassment may serve to minimise feelings of isolation and depression. However, there is little research investigating individuals' perceptions of cyber-harassment. Future research would be beneficial in addressing this gap in the literature as individuals' perceptions of cyber-harassment may influence the social support available to victims.

Chapter 6: Non-Victims' Perceptions of Cyber-Harassment

6.1 Introduction

The primary objective of this study is to expand the findings from the first two studies of this thesis. Study 1 illustrated that undergraduate students perceived some online behaviours associated with cyber-harassment (CH) (such as sending malicious software or harassing messages) but were unsure about other behaviours (such as behaviours associated with deception/disclosure). Study 2 illustrated that CH can have a detrimental impact on some undergraduate students. Importantly, the quality of social support (SS) may play an important role in minimising the impact of cyber-harassment on victims and helping them to cope with their experiences. This study explores undergraduate students' perceptions of CH, including perceptions of cyber-harassed victims, criminality, and police involvement.

Just world beliefs may affect individuals' perceptions of cyber-harassed victims and perpetrators. Based on observations that individuals engage in victim-blaming strategies, Lerner and Miller (1978) describe the 'just world' hypothesis. According to the hypothesis, people have a need to believe that the world is just, and people get what they deserve. Belief in a just world is adaptive because it allows individuals to perceive their environment as controllable and safe. If individuals are faced with injustice, cognitive dissonance motivates them to address the imbalance between their belief in the just world and the injustice. This is achieved by either compensating the victim or convincing themselves that the victim is responsible for their own fate.

According to the hypothesis, when victims are perceived to suffer without compensation, perceivers are motivated to devalue the victim by attributing blame to the victim's character or behaviour. Jones and Aronson (1973) recruited 234 undergraduate students to participate in a vignette study in which a hypothetical perpetrator raped or attempted to rape the victim. The victim's respectability was manipulated by presenting her as a virgin, married, or divorced. Participants perceived the victim as more responsible for the rape if she was portrayed as a virgin or married compared to a divorcee. When the victim is portrayed as innocent, the perceiver perceives a greater threat to her or himself that a

similar event may happen to them (Lerner & Miller, 1978). To minimise the perceived threat, individuals devalue the victim and blame their behaviour and/or character. By doing so, the perceiver distances themselves from the likelihood of the event happening to them.

The just world hypothesis has also been investigated in relation to perceptions about offline stalking. Sheridan, Gillett, Davies, Blaauw and Patel (2003) recruited 168 undergraduate students to participate in a vignette study. Participants were presented with one of six vignettes, that varied in terms of the gender of the target (male or female) and the prior victim-perpetrator relationship (ex-intimate, acquaintance, or stranger). The findings supported the researchers' hypotheses, suggesting the vignette was perceived to be stalking when the perpetrator was a stranger or acquaintance. Victims were perceived to be more responsible for being stalked when the perpetrator was an ex-intimate or acquaintance compared to a stranger. Police intervention was perceived as necessary if the stalker was a stranger or male, and bodily injury was perceived more likely if the perpetrator was male as opposed to female. In relation to just world beliefs, the authors concluded victims were perceived as more to blame if they had a previous relationship with the perpetrator as they had the opportunity to give the perpetrator some cause for instigating stalking.

The just world hypothesis may have particular relevance to the current study. Participants may perceive victims of CH as responsible for their harassment experiences. Empirical research suggests undergraduate students are likely to use the Internet on a regular basis (Dutton & Helsper, 2007). Participants' online usage may heighten the threat of becoming a victim of CH. To minimise any perceived threat, participants may attribute responsibility of CH to the victims' behaviour and/or character.

Just world beliefs may contribute to secondary victimisation of victims. Secondary victimisation occurs when crime victims fear stigmatisation and negative other-evaluations following their experiences of crime (Kenney, 2002). In conjunction with just world beliefs, the virtual nature of CH may increase the likelihood of secondary victimisation. It is necessary to explore perceptions of CH as secondary victimisation may deter victims from reporting their experiences to the police or seeking support from their peers to help them cope with CH.

As CH occurs in a virtual world, the impact of CH may be trivialised. The second study of this thesis suggested that some participants perceived cyber-harassing behaviours as an Internet norm. If there is a general perception that CH is an Internet norm, this will contribute to the trivialisation of CH. If CH is trivialised, the impact of CH may not be recognised by participants. Thus, victims of CH may be stigmatised and suffer secondary victimisation.

However, online behaviour may not be perceived as having consequences offline. Alexy, Burgess, Baker and Smoyak (2005) reported that 30% of participants did not label a vignette as cyberstalking, even though the vignette depicted a genuine, severe case of cyberstalking. Furthermore, 7% did not perceive the vignette as depicting CH. Whilst this study raises concerns regarding perceptions of cyberstalking, the majority of participants, at least, considered the perpetrator's behaviour as CH. Drawing from object relations theory, Whitty (2007) proposed that people 'split' their online behaviour from the offline world. As such, individuals may not perceive online behaviours as constituting harassment as they may not believe online behaviours can impact on peoples' offline lives.

It has also been suggested that gender may also contribute to individual differences in perceptions of CH (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004). Some evidence suggests that females are more sensitive to privacy intrusions and harassment than males (e.g., Agatston, Kowalski & Limber, 2007). In contrast, Sheridan, Gillett and Davies (2002) compared gender differences in perceptions of offline stalking in a sample of 210 participants. They reported that males and females do not differ in their perceptions of the types of behaviours considered to constitute offline stalking. This suggests that whilst gender differences exist in sensitivity to harassing behaviours, when considering the behaviours associated with harassment, gender differences may dissipate.

The current study may provide important insights about the SS available to cyber-harassed victims. Study 2 of this thesis suggested that the quality of SS was an important factor for helping individuals cope with their experiences of CH. The buffering hypothesis explains that social support 'buffers' the effect of stressful events, thereby minimising the impact of stress and promotes well-being (Yap & Devilly, 2004). However, the combination of the

virtual nature of CH and potential trivialisation of the impact of CH may reduce the social support available to victims.

Evidence suggests that victims of both offline (e.g., Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998) and online harassment (e.g., Finn, 2004) are reluctant to report their experiences to the police. This was further evidenced in the second study of this thesis. This may, in part, be due to peoples' perceptions of CH. At present, there is little research investigating whether CH should be reported to the police, or the stage at which the police should become involved. This is important as not only is it an indicator of perceived criminality, but may also indicate the level and type of SS available to victims.

Peoples' perceptions of CH will have particular relevance if a perpetrator is being prosecuted for their behaviour. If a case involving CH is brought before court for prosecution, the perpetrator would be judged by their peers. It is therefore necessary to explore people's perceptions of CH so further understanding of how jurors may react if they are to judge a case involving CH.

6.1.2 Rationale

There is a need to gain an understanding of undergraduate students' perceptions of cyber-harassment, and in particular their perceptions of cyber-harassed victims. Participants' perceptions are of relevance as they will provide some insight to the social support available to cyber-harassed victims who turn to their peers for help in coping with their experiences. Furthermore, participants' perceptions of cyber-harassed victims will provide some insight to the possibility of cyber-harassed victims facing secondary victimisation.

6.1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

This study aimed primarily to explore undergraduate students of CH, including their perceptions of victims and police involvement. Key objectives were to: 1) provide in-depth accounts of participants' perceptions of CH; 2) explore how and why participants judge cyber-harassing behaviours as criminal; 3) explore participants' perceptions of police

involvement in cases involving CH; and 4) determine whether participants recognise the impact CH can have on victims, and explore their reasons behind these perceptions.

6.2 Method

6.2.1 Participants

Seventeen undergraduate students from Nottingham Trent University participated in this study, consisting of 14 females and 3 males aged between 18 and 40 years ($M = 22$, $SD = 6$). All participants were self-selected volunteers, and were not intended to form a representative sample of undergraduate students. As participants were recruited via email (see Appendix 6), it is not possible to provide response rates as it is not clear how many participants received, and read the invitation (Joinson & Reips, 2007). Participant recruitment continued until data saturation was reached (Marshall, 1996).

Table 23: Participants' Demographic Information for Study 3

Participants' pseudonyms	Age
Ann	19
Ava	19
Christine	18
Edith	18
Emma	40
Hazel	21
Heather	21
Jack	18
Janet	19
Megan	24
Molly	19
Patricia	33
Rachael	18
Richard	18
Ruth	20
Seamus	25
Susan	19

6.2.2 Measures

Online semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' perceptions of CH. Considering the exploratory nature of this research, qualitative methods were deemed most appropriate as quantitative research would be restricted to issues conceived of by the researcher, and do not allow the freedom for participants to offer data not previously considered. As the research investigated a sensitive, novel topic, care was taken with the

ordering of questions to minimise socially desirable responding and increase disclosure. The interview consisted of four main sections about participants' perceptions of:

- 1) CH and why CH occurs.
- 2) Their attitudes towards victims and the impact CH can have on victims.
- 3) Criminality and suggestions of legislation that could be used to prosecute CH.
- 4) Police involvement.

6.2.3 Procedure

An email invitation was sent to groups of undergraduate students in Nottingham Trent University. The invitation briefly described the study and provided a URL link to *SurveyMonkey.com*. Upon clicking the link, participants were provided with more detailed information about the study. As the data gathered via email for the second study in this thesis was less rich than data gathered via *Instant Messenger* (IM), participants were informed they would require the use of IM software to participate in this study. After reading the study information, participants could provide some demographic information and complete informed consent. Following consent, participants were asked to provide an email address through which they could be contacted to take part in the interview. After participants provided their consent, participants were contacted via email to arrange a suitable time for the online interview. As with the second phase of research, care was taken to establish rapport with participants during initial emails. This was achieved by discussing upcoming exams, current projects and coursework participants were completing, shared experiences, and Christmas preparations.

The interviews were conducted over a six-week period and lasted between 45 to 75 minutes, dependant on the depth of participants' responses and the issues that arose requiring further probing. Prior to, and immediately following the interview, all participants were asked if they still wanted to participate in the study, and were reminded of their right to withdraw. Finally, participants were asked if they had any questions about the research, which were answered and participants were debriefed.

6.2.4 Analysis

Following data collection, the transcripts were prepared for analysis by transferring the data from *IM* chat logs to *Microsoft Word*. The font for all transcripts was changed to Times New Roman, size 12 with 1.5 line spacing, and the transcripts were fully anonymised. In this format, the transcripts ranged from 5-13 pages ($M = 8.1$; $SD = 2.3$).

The data were analysed using thematic analysis as described by Miles and Huberman (1994) as this method of analysis is appropriate to explore a topic when knowledge is limited. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was not appropriate for this study as IPA focuses on participants' 'personal lived experiences' (Smith, 2004, p.40). As participants did not experience cyber-harassment, IPA was not an appropriate analytical tool for this study.

Table 24: Analytical process used for thematic analysis

Stage	Process
1	Familiarity with the data was gained by reading all of transcripts several times.
2	Initial coding of the data had a broad focus and consideration was given to the research questions. Recurring themes and patterns across the data set were identified.
3	The data was organised by grouping the data into themes. Extracts were taken from the data and kept in separate <i>Microsoft Word</i> files reflecting each theme identified.
4	All of the extracts in each theme were analysed to ensure how they related to the over-arching theme and subtle differences were noted. This stage involved the refinement of themes and gave themes meaning and depth.
5	The themes were named and extracts were re-read to ensure the theme accurately reflected the extracts of data.
6	The themes were tabulated and extracts were organised in preparation for reporting.
7	All transcripts were re-read to ensure the themes accurately reflected participants' views and opinions.

Table 24 describes the analytical process used for this study. The thematic analysis involved the identification of patterns of views, and meanings discussed by participants

with specific reference to the research questions. The themes identified were organised in a coherent manner that provided meaning to the data. To increase validity and reliability, the supervisory team were provided with anonymised transcripts of the interviews, and they provided their comments on the themes identified.

6.3 Results

Three themes were identified during data analysis: ‘anonymity’, ‘social support’, and ‘victim blame’. Each of the themes will be considered, and excerpts from the transcripts are provided to allow for the assessment of interpretations.

6.3.1 Theme 1: Anonymity

‘Anonymity’ was the first major theme identified in this study. Participants explained the perpetrator’s anonymity contributed to the ease of engaging in CH. Anonymity was perceived to reduce the perpetrator’s sense of vulnerability and accountability. Often participants described the complex interplay between the perceived prior relationship with the victim and the perpetrator’s desire to remain anonymous.

At the most fundamental level, participants perceived CH to be ‘easy’ because the Internet is accessible to many. Engaging in CH was perceived as ‘easy’ because it required the perpetrator to use fewer resources than would be required to harass someone offline:

It’s easier because the person cannot be seen...because the internet is more accessible and it doesn’t take a lot of energy I think. **Megan**

Whilst the ease of engaging in CH does not imply anonymity, participants clearly perceived anonymity as playing a central role in CH, making it easy to engage in it:

It must be easier to harass someone online because there’s the element of anonymity...I’d probably go for on the Internet for convenience. **Emma**

Christine highlighted social networking sites as a method through which perpetrators could access a variety of information about a potential victim. As she noted, people place a lot of

personal information (such as their age, address, information about their friends, and photos) in one location, making it easy for someone to engage in CH:

It's so easy – for example, most people's profiles on *Facebook* and *Bebo* aren't set to private or they don't hide any of their personal information, so you can see how old they are, where they live, who they're friends with and then look through all their photos. **Christine**

Two participants explained visual anonymity allows the perpetrator to deny the existence of the victim, in a sense dehumanising the victim. In this respect, the computer acts as a barrier to the victim's reaction to CH. Ava perceived that it is the lack of social cues available in CMC contributes to the perpetrator's unregulated behaviour. As perpetrators cannot see the victim, or their reaction, perpetrators cannot gauge the impact of their behaviour on the victim. Consequently, they may not know their behaviour constitutes harassment and fails to stop. In this respect, the lack of social cues available in online communications leads to a failure in self-regulation of perpetrators behaviours.

It's an easy way to contact someone and they don't have to face the person that they're doing it to, which, if they did, and saw that person's reaction and how they felt about it they'd probably think twice. It's also that people seem to be braver in emails and don't seem to care how bad things are that they are saying because they don't have to see that person. **Ava**

Anonymity was perceived to remove accountability of the perpetrator's actions. The lack of accountability for one's online behaviour was perceived to produce feelings of invulnerability. In turn, invulnerability was perceived to spur individuals to engage in behaviours online that they would not engage in offline, including behaviours associated with CH.

It's not face to face and things can be fabricated...people do things that they wouldn't necessarily do in person...people can change things and tell lies about themselves and never really be found out...people can lie about themselves and be someone different. Someone who they might not be able to be in real life as they don't want to be judged. **Susan**

That would be easier for them as there's no repercussions so to speak whereas if their identity is out in the open then obviously police/parents/schools dependent on ages can get involved. **Emma**

As Susan highlighted, online anonymity allows individuals to play with their identity and create new identities. Online personas disguise the perpetrator's identity from other Internet users, making them less easy to identify and thus, harder to make accountable for their behaviour.

As individuals enjoy anonymity on the Internet, participants perceived the perpetrators of CH to be anonymous in the majority of CH cases. As such, participants reported perpetrators cannot be held accountable for their actions. The only repercussion perceived by many participants was banning from Internet sites (such as social networking sites or chat rooms). However, banning was associated with an online identity, rather than an individual. This lack of accountability was perceived to provide perpetrators with a sense of power that they could not enjoy in face-to-face communications as they cannot hide their identity.

I think that the people who bully them enjoy the fact that there aren't really that many repercussions. If at school someone is a bully they could face exclusion. Although you can ban people from certain websites, they could always make another account and come back online. It gives them a sense of power they may not be able to achieve in everyday life. **Ann**

It gives people power...cos [because] they can say anything they want with few consequences, and know that it will still hurt the person on the other end, they can type it instead of saying it which is easier anyway. **Janet**

Many participants perceived the lack of bodily presence in CMC as a crucial factor when discussing the lack of consequences for online behaviours associated with CH. As with the computer acting as a barrier to the victim's reaction, the computer also acts as a barrier to the perpetrator who may face a physical altercation with the victim:

They [threats] could be carried out but it's easier to make a threat online without the intention of following through with it because you're hiding behind a computer screen. **Ruth**

They [perpetrators] can't get a whack. No consequences...nothing is personally identifiable as there is a physical barrier. **Richard**

Whilst participants acknowledged that victims and perpetrators of CH may have had some sort of relationship prior to the onset of CH, the majority of participants expressed that strangers were more likely to engage in cyber-harassing behaviours.

Seamus: You could also be harassed not only by a stranger but by someone you have come into contact with b4 'meeting' on the internet.

Interviewer: which do you think is more common?

Seamus: Strangers

However, two participants perceived that a prior relationship is likely to exist between the perpetrators and victims of CH. Heather explained she had read about cases involving CH between individuals who had a prior relationship, and perceived the perpetrator's motive to be associated with revenge. She further qualified her perceptions by arguing that the victim has to provide the perpetrator with their contact details, allowing the perpetrator to engage in CH.

I would probably guess that the majority of harassment online is by someone they know somehow. **Emma**

I would imagine, from the few cases I have seen or read about, that it is linked to personal disagreements and arguments that have occurred previously...CH suggests that the parties have previously exchanged contact details (for example email addresses, phone numbers etc) which make it possible. Obviously, there will be cases where they may not know the offender but I would imagine that in most cases it does occur between people who know each other. **Heather**

When considering a prior relationship between the perpetrator and victim, participants perceived the depth of friendship involved prior to CH to be an important factor. The level of friendship was also associated with the level of detail the perpetrator may know about the victim. As can be seen from Ruth's comments, theory of mind was invoked to understand how a victim of CH would be perceived.

If it was someone who I spoke to often or who was close friends with one of my friends chances are they would already know where I worked or where I went in my spare time but if it was someone who I only vaguely knew, or knew through friends then it would be a bit weird to think that they knew more about me than I do about them! **Ruth**

Molly was the only participant who indicated that anonymity was more likely to be desired by perpetrators when the perpetrator was a friend or family member of the victim. However, Molly associated strangers who engage in CH with paedophilia and this perception may have influenced her perceptions about the prior relationship between the perpetrator and victim. In such a case, the perpetrator would maintain their anonymity, presumably whilst grooming the victim but then ‘reveal themselves’ when they intended to meet the victim. Other participants associated strangers engaging in CH with paedophilia but did not elaborate on this during their discussions about the prior relationship.

I think if it were a friend or member of the family harassing a person they knew then they would like to keep it anonymous, however if it were a stranger, or a paedophile even, I think they would like to reveal themselves to the victim. **Molly**

All participants considered the impact CH may have on victims. Whilst the majority of participants acknowledged that CH would have a negative impact on victims, Ruth considered the impact to be reduced in comparison to offline harassment. Ruth argued the victim could not suffer physical harm as a consequence of CH and thus, the impact should be less when compared to offline harassment.

I think because it's easier to delete them or ignore it, it doesn't have as much of an impact on people as harassment in person...i don't think it's as bad as other types of harassment but it can definitely have some sort of impact on their lives and the decisions they make on the internet...you can't really be physically hurt directly from harassment online so it seems less serious. **Ruth**

However, the majority of participants believed CH could impact negatively on victims. At the very least, participants considered that CH may make victims less likely to use the Internet following their experiences:

I think it could stop people doing what they would normally do like maybe use the internet less. **Hazel**

You have to be online – to keep in touch with people – to do your work etc. and if every time you do something on your pc someone annoys you – you get paranoid and afraid of doing things on the pc. **Patricia**

I think that it can make people scared of using internet sites...because I think they would feel that any kind of information they write even a comment to a friend could be read by someone who would then use that information to try and talk to them...if they were scared enough then I guess that would continue in their offline lives too as they may feel that the person trying to add them knows where they live. **Edith**

However, other participants reported that victims may suffer psychological harm following CH. The types of psychological harm identified by participants included stress, anxiety, fear, and rumination. As can be seen from Seamus' transcript, death was also considered to be a potential consequence of CH. However, Seamus did not elaborate whether a victim would commit suicide or be murdered by the perpetrator. Furthermore, Janet connected the perpetrator's anonymity whilst online to increasing the victim's fear and mistrust offline as the victim does not know who their harasser is.

It can cause emotional distress and anxiety, just like any other sort of harassment...they will constantly be thinking about what has been said/done online. **Jack**

It can cause them a lot of stress. It might make the person scared to go out in case they see this person. They might be reluctant to use the computer. **Susan**

It can have many outcomes from embarrassment, fear and even the extreme – death. **Seamus**

I think they would suffer as you can harass someone online anonymously and so offline they might be scared to speak to people they know or trust people as fear it could be those people doing it. It would be hard to know that you didn't know the person but they know all of your details they may become very anxious people. **Janet**

Interestingly, Ann considered the degree to which victims use the Internet prior to their cyber-harassing experiences as having particular importance to how the experience would impact them. Whilst Ann commented that CH can be 'just as negative on mental health as offline harassment', she implied the degree to which victims use the Internet prior to their experiences may correlate with the degree to which the experience impacts them.

It would probably depend on the person and how invested they were on the website. If they just went on a website for fun and not to talk to others,

they'd probably not take much notice. If they spent a lot of time on it then it could be hurtful and perhaps even cause them to become as depressed as someone who was bullied offline...I think the consequences can be just as negative on mental health as offline harassment. **Ann**

CH was perceived to have a greater affect on victims when the perpetrator remained anonymous. Participants perceived victims to be 'paranoid' and constantly searching for (or avoiding contact with) the identity of the unknown perpetrator. Paranoia was associated with mistrust, with victims unable to trust people on the Internet or in offline contexts.

You don't know who you are dealing with therefore anyone in your surrounding could be the harasser – which makes it stressful and living a "normal life". You always wonder who it might be and if eg someone looks at you longer you might think that this is the harasser. **Patricia**

I think it may make you feel more vulnerable when you're out alone, possibly paranoid from not knowing who to trust, and may be even not wanting to make new friends online because of a bad experience with a harasser. **Molly**

It may make them more wary of who they talk to, websites they visit etc offline they may become paranoid that people they bump into are the ones harassing them online...i think they could become paranoid because they're wondering whether those around them could be the ones bothering them online. **Emma**

Some people would feel intimidated by someone adding them who they don't know and feel they have put too much information on their profiles so would be scared into deleting it. Or people that accept friend requests when they don't know the person may feel scared that this person now has access to personal details about themselves. **Edith**

Whilst the majority of participants believed an anonymous perpetrator would impact greater on victims, three participants suggested a non-anonymous perpetrator would have a greater impact on victims.

I think they [victims] could become paranoid if the bully starts to scare them about, particularly if the bully knew who they were before like knew their routine and stuff and I think this could lead to paranoia if the victim and bully were friends before. **Megan**

6.3.2 Theme 2: Social Support

Participants considered the quality of social support (SS) they could provide a friend, if that friend experienced CH and approached them for help. All participants stated they would help a friend who had suffered CH. However, participants considered various factors that would influence whether SS could be given, the depth of SS, and there were limits to the amount of SS they could provide.

Some participants indicated the level, or depth, of friendship they shared with a cyber-harassed victim would play an intrinsic role in determining whether SS was offered. The depth of friendship implied participants' knowledge of the victim. If the victim was a close friend and was perceived as 'genuine' and not attention-seeking, participants were more likely to offer SS.

Depending on friends proximity within my social circle of course, a good friend I would talk through getting their IP address and giving it to me to dish out punishment. **Richard**

If I could see someone was genuinely afraid...and they weren't just putting it on to get attention or whatever you would be able to see it was true and they weren't overreacting. **Christine**

Whilst participants indicated they would believe the victim was suffering CH, participants required proof that this was actually the case. Both Ava and Heather suggested that proof of emails and/or text messages would justify their offer of SS. Heather commented that should proof be available, she would 'believe them without question'. This is interesting as the requirement of proof is itself questioning the victim's experience. Heather's indicated that the ability of victims to provide evidence of CH would be evaluated in conjunction with prior knowledge of the victim. Despite these caveats, both participants maintained they would help someone experiencing CH.

It depends upon my relationship with them and also the nature of the harassment. If they had still got the messages on their phone/computer and they were clearly upsetting then I would believe them without question. If they were unable to support their story with any evidence and were also generally known for telling tall stories then I may think twice about how

serious the harassment was but would probably still try to help them anyway. **Heather**

I'd probably check the emails in case but if a friend had come to me in confidence about it I'd take it seriously, especially if that's how they felt. Harassment affects people in different ways so what might not affect one person might terrify another. **Ava**

When participants considered being approached by a cyber-harassed victim, five participants spoke in emotive terms about how this would impact on themselves. Participants indicated they would be shocked, or upset, to hear about a friend suffering CH. Edith focused on the possible implications of depression, and showed empathy with someone feeling depressed, rather than focusing on the trigger. Both Hazel and Molly indicated feeling pity for a cyber-harassed victim.

I would need to know why they were that afraid but from personal experience if you really are that depressed and no-one believes you it makes you ten times worse and I could never do that to someone. **Edith**

The friend I wouldn't think any different of because they haven't done anything wrong really. You'd feel sorry for them I suppose. **Hazel**

I would probably feel sorry for them and ask them to share what had happened. **Molly**

Participants discussed advice they would give to someone experiencing CH. Often (as can be seen from Ruth's comments below) participants advised that victims should try to ignore the perpetrator by using the 'block' feature of email, messenger, or social networking sites. Edith said she would help a victim to set up new homepages on the Internet, restricting the amount of information the victim would place on it. These forms of advice suggest encouraging victims to use the Internet in safer ways.

I'd probably initially tell them just to block the person and ignore it but if it got too much I'd think that they should contact the police...if it was really getting to the person, like if the harassment was constant and had been going on for months. **Ruth**

I would understand why they felt like that but encourage them to speak about it and help them re-set up a page that ensures that no-one could gain too much personal details from it. **Edith**

However, Janet and Ava suggested they would offer more extreme forms of advice to cyber-harassed victims. Janet implied the victim should retaliate against the perpetrator. In her transcript she described that ‘it doesn’t become bullying anymore it becomes a fight’, which implies victims should be encouraged to stand up for themselves.

I do know I would probably try and help them and be horrible to the person back so it doesn’t become bullying anymore it becomes a fight.

Janet

In contrast to other participants, Ava suggested victims should simply avoid online spaces where they have experienced CH. She concluded by stating that victims should not use the Internet at all.

Probably tell them to delete whatever accounts they were being contacted on, tell them not to go on the internet at all. **Ava**

Providing emotional support to cyber-harassed victims was the most commonly reported method of helping victims. Participants reported they would encourage cyber-harassed victims to talk about their experiences, which was believed would provide comfort to victims. During such conversations, participants explained they would advise victims to talk to other people (such as parents, counsellors, internet service providers, the police, or helplines), or to formulate a strategy to end cyber-harassment.

I’d want to help them, I’d talk to them but then I’d maybe advise them to talk to someone like parents, and maybe get rid of their online account?

Rachael

I’d try to comfort them and find out what had been going on. Then I’d get them to report the user to the website’s admin and block the users, if possible. **Ann**

I would support/advise them to the best extent of my knowledge and try and get it stopped. I don’t think it should be considered any different to any other form of harassment. **Heather**

Like there are family and friends to begin with, and I think the police would help and there are helplines and things to get in touch with. **Rachael**

Two participants indicated they would adopt a ‘tough love’ approach towards victims. Janet reported that she would tell a victim to ‘grow some balls’, which may trivialise the impact of CH. Jack also trivialised CH as he perceived it not being ‘not true’ and not occurring in ‘real life’. This emphasises the virtual nature of CH, implies that it cannot impact on one’s ‘real life’.

I’d tell them to grow some balls and do something about it. I’d obviously feel horrible for saying that but you can’t let it take over your life. **Janet**

I would try and explain to them nothing will happen, and they are safe...tell them it doesn’t matter whatever happened online/tell them it’s not true, just show that their ‘real life’ friends and people are there for them. **Jack**

Alternatively, Susan said she would offer reassurances that the perpetrator probably lives a long distance from the victim. By offering such advice, she implied the perpetrator would probably not be able to physically harm the victim. Importantly, she acknowledged this advice could be deceitful as there may be no way to know where the perpetrator lives.

I wouldn’t probably try to reassure them and say that the person probably lives miles away but in reality they could be from anywhere and live just around the corner. **Susan**

Upon talking with victims of CH, participants imagined they would seek further information about CH in a bid to help victims. Whilst none of the participants were able (during the interview) to identify organisations devoted to helping cyber-harassed victims, they indicated they would seek such organisations to obtain advice on how to help a friend suffering CH. As can be seen from Jack’s transcript, he viewed it as his ‘responsibility’ to not only seek advice from other sources, but to inform others of the victim’s experiences.

I would feel it was my responsibility to help them, seek advice, inform someone else. **Jack**

I’d probably say to like block them off all your stuff on your computer like MSN, delete them from any social networking sites etc but then I wouldn’t really know what to do next. Probably find out if there’s some sort of charity/helpline and see what they suggest. **Christine**

Whilst participants reported offering SS to victims, participants felt they could not help victims who experienced severe CH. In an attempt to qualify the severity of CH, Christine's transcript demonstrated that CH is severe if it incorporates 'proper' bullying, which she defined as offline bullying.

I guess the harassment would have to be serious...um like proper bullying, or well anything that's not just 'stalking' on the internet alone. **Christine**

Assuming the severity of CH is measurable by the impact it has on victims, participants discussed being unable to help victims if they felt seriously impacted by their experiences. Seamus considered the help he could provide if a cyber-harassed friend was afraid to leave his/her home following their experience. Seamus is clear that helping such a friend would be beyond the help he could provide.

Interviewer: What would you think if a friend told you they were afraid to leave their home because they had been cyber-harassed?

Seamus: They will need professional and more qualified help, perhaps the police, a psychologist.

6.3.3 Theme 3: Victim Blame

Despite awareness of the impact of CH on victims, and indications that participants would provide some degree of SS to victims, participants displayed tendencies to attribute blame to victims for their experiences. Victim-blaming tendencies included perceiving the victim's online behaviour as an invitation to perpetrators of CH, and attributing the degree to which CH impacts on victims to their personality. In contrast, perpetrators were perceived more sympathetically compared to victims. Finally, all participants believed that victims should be responsible for preventing CH, and stopping it when it occurs. However, these views were held towards adult victims and not teenagers or children.

Victims were perceived to invite CH because of their online behaviour. In this respect, participants believed that it is the individual's 'fault' for placing personal information online, especially on social networking sites. Participants noted there is awareness of how to be safe online, and cyber-harassed victims were perceived to have ignored such warnings.

At the end of the day it's all on a computer, you can change the person you are through the internet, it's all on screen none of it really matters and the people that actually matter are face to face with you...annnnddd you've heard to be so careful when you're online... Mainly the individual person [is responsible] for knowing who they are adding in the first place. **Janet**

It's your choice to put all your personal information on the internet in the first place...in a way it's your fault. **Christine**

Edith noted that 'a lot of blame is put on these people' but distances her from victim-blaming tendencies by suggesting victims are blamed by others, and she is merely observing this tendency. This is in contrast to Christine's comments, as she explicitly stated 'in a way it's your fault', confirming this is her own view.

I think it can be a real problem but I think that a lot of blame is put on these people [victims] when sometimes they [perpetrators] may see you putting your personal information on a page as an invite into your life.
Edith

Edith also noted that females may be more vulnerable to CH because of differences in how females communicate online compared to males. Edith perceived females to place more personal information on the Internet compared to men. Additionally, she argued that males would not communicate with strangers on the Internet, and would find it easier to ignore CH compared with females.

I'm not saying it doesn't happen to guys as well but I think that more often its females who are prone to it. Especially those who are more open about their details on [social networking sites]...I think girls put down a lot more information about themselves than guys do...i think that guys wouldn't accept someone they don't know in the first place but if they did I think they would find it easier to ignore. **Edith**

Some participants discussed the receipt of malicious software that could be used to access information held on one's computer, or to damage one's software or hardware. When malicious software was discussed in relation to CH, the majority of participants blamed the recipient for opening programmes or attachments which malicious software would be embedded in. In particular, Emma made a distinction between the maliciousness of sending such software but did not perceive malicious software as a behaviour associated with

harassment. It is noteworthy that participants did not perceive malicious software as particularly threatening.

Probably they [victim] opened a wrong attachment and they are sensible but I would worry about them as there is little anyone can do to stop it.

Patricia

But you could just block them if that [receiving malicious software] happens so then they can't access information on your computer. **Megan**

If it was a virus I wouldn't think much of it I'd probably think it was my own fault for opening it...I would view it as malicious because it's a way to hurt others by getting what you want but I don't think I'd view that as harassment. **Emma**

In conjunction with blaming victims for 'inviting' CH, participants blamed the impact of CH on victims' personality characteristics. For example, Richard suggested victims are 'sensitive' if they are upset following a cyber-harassing experience. By describing the perpetrator as a '14 year old brain box' he trivialised the impact CH can have. However, he equated CH as occurring between strangers.

I think you have to be rather sensitive in the first place to take cyber-bullying seriously as options have been provided to block contact with the culprit...if you are that sensitive to get depressed cuz [because] a 14 year old brain box found out your city and said he is going to wipe your nose with a used nappy you should not participate in online communication with strangers. **Richard**

In another example, Ann tried to understand the impact of CH by imagining how she might respond. By stating that she would not get 'that upset' over CH she implied that victims' personality characteristics play a role in how CH impacts on them.

I don't think I'd personally ever get that upset over it...if someone bothers me I tend to just ignore them. I don't try and let other people upset me that much offline or online. **Ann**

Similarly, Ava suggested that shyness, lack of confidence, social anxiety, and prior experiences of harassment may confound the impact of CH on victims. However, she

noted that victims cannot change their personality and, in this respect, she was not blaming victims for the impact CH has on them.

I think it can deeply affect people especially those that are less confident in dealing with those kinds of things and people that have had a difficult time, like, for example, people that were bullied at school, they are going to have a harder time dealing with it and it can affect their confidence in themselves as well as in other people...you get people that are confident in themselves generally and then there are those that are less confident and possibly less sociable and more shy just because that's how they are as a person, nothing made them that way but they may feel like they can't tell someone or no-one will take them seriously. **Ava**

In general, victims were perceived to be at fault for their experiences of CH. However, perpetrators were perceived to engage in cyber-harassing behaviours because of their personality, and in some cases, CH was equated to illness or addiction. Edith, Ann and Emma suggested perpetrators are 'sad' and lonely', implying they are simply seeking companionship. In addition, Edith believed the majority of perpetrators do not intend to cause harm to victims. This implies the impact of CH is accidental as it is unintended.

I believe that in most cases they aren't meaning to cause harm... I think some people are just lonely and want the company of particularly females.
Edith

I think people who harass people on the internet are very sad people with no life at all...Alcoholics have to go to meetings so maybe online harassers should be "retrained" into online decency. **Emma**

Although bullying causes a lot of psychological damage to some people, I think that normal bullies don't really have much connection to other people. **Ann**

Victims were perceived as responsible for preventing CH and trying all methods available to them for solving problems of CH before they should report their experience to the police, or other authorities (such as ISPs). Methods of preventing and stopping CH should it occur included making use of 'blocking' features available on websites, keeping social networking profiles private, by not accepting friends' requests if the person is unknown, not opening email attachments from unknown senders, and changing their online contact

details should they experience CH. Adults were considered responsible for ensuring that children and teenagers are protected and safe whilst using the Internet.

If it's older [than school aged individuals] I think the person should just delete the person, yeah why don't they just delete the fuckers? **Janet**

Honestly, I think that the responsibility should kind of be with the victims, sites like *Facebook* have ways to keep your profiles private and don't accept anyone you don't know and with regards to viruses you should never click on links sent by someone you don't know. I think there are some nasty people out there and some lonely people too but that's unavoidable so you have to look after yourself. **Edith**

On most things you can block the person who is harassing you so its easier to sort of 'get rid' of the problem...i think the person needs to have done all they can to stop it, like blocking the person, changing details etc but if the person harassing them finds a way around that or persists for a long time then I think the police need to know. **Hazel**

People who are harassed are unfortunate, but capable dependent on the harassment situation to prevent/stop it from happening... For children/teenagers parents can put restrictions on internet usage/pc usage for adults they should use their common sense and not open themselves up to anything which could cause them problems. **Emma**

They can be careful about who they give information and contact details to, also they have to be careful about who they add on to their chat rooms, and always inform someone if they're being harassed and also change their email accounts or stop using the chat room/website. **Megan**

6.4 Discussion

6.4.1 Anonymity

Participants perceived the Internet as a barrier that protects the perpetrator from the victim's emotional reaction, and potential physical retaliation to CH. This barrier allows the perpetrator to dehumanise the victim, and protects the perpetrator by allowing them to believe they are not doing anything wrong to another individual (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Participants explained the lack of social presence of the perpetrator and victim reduced the social cues available to perpetrators. This was important because participants believed if the perpetrators were able to see the victim's reaction, they would stop cyber-harassing them. This explanation closely resembles Sproull and Kiesler's (1986) social context cues theory (SCCT) (see Chapter 2: 'Anonymity as an Incentive to Engage in Cyberstalking' for a full discussion of the theory). In brief, SCCT postulates that individuals use static and dynamic social cues to regulate a person's own behaviour. An absence of social cues results in feelings of anonymity, which leads to self-focused and unregulated behaviour.

Whilst some participants thought that victims of CH are likely to have a prior relationship with the perpetrator, the majority of participants believed the victim and perpetrator are likely to be strangers. Research indicates strangers are the largest single category of the prior perpetrator-victim relationship in instances of CH (e.g., Bocij, 2003; Finn, 2004; Li, 2007) compared to other categories (such as ex-intimates, and acquaintances) indicating the victim and perpetrator knew each other prior to the onset of CH. Such findings have led Bocij (2003) to conclude that stranger-stalking is common. However, if divisions created for the known categories were collapsed, research indicates victims are more likely to know the perpetrator prior to CH. Recently, Sheridan and Grant (2007) found the prior victim-perpetrator relationship mirrors the findings of offline harassment, indicating that the majority of victims know their harasser prior to the onset of CH. Thus, participants' perceptions of strangers engaging in CH are distorted representations of what actually occurs, and may reflect stereotypical views of CH.

Participants' associations between CH and online sexual solicitation may have influenced their perceptions that stranger-stalking is more likely. Sexual predators that use the internet to locate and groom children are unlikely to know the victim prior to the onset of abuse (Dombrowski, Le Masney, Ahia & Dickson, 2004; Feather, 1999; Quayle & Taylor, 2001). Participants did not specifically discuss paedophilia in relation to stranger-stalking. However, their associations of CH with online paedophilia were discussed early on during the interviews, and perceptions of strangers engaging in CH may reflect priming effects.

Participants believed that CH victims cannot be physically harmed by the perpetrator because they made a distinct separation between offline and online harassment. However, participants suggested victims may use the Internet less, and may experience psychological harm including stress, anxiety, fear, rumination, and paranoia. As participants generally held a stereotype that strangers engage in CH and want to maintain their anonymity, participants perceived the impact of CH to be heightened by the degree to which the victim uses the Internet and the perpetrator's anonymity.

6.4.2 Social Support

The findings of this study indicate the SS offered to victims of CH would depend on the victim's characteristics, and proof of CH occurring. If victims are perceived as attention-seeking, the quality of SS may be reduced. Additionally, the requirement of proof may be problematic for victims seeking SS. Victims may not record every instance of CH perpetrated, and as harassment is often an accumulation of events (Meloy, 1998), victims may not be able to prove the extent of harassment they suffer. Also, as individuals differ in their perceptions of CH (see Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005), those who victims approach for help in dealing with CH may not perceive the perpetrator's behaviour in the same manner as victims.

Despite factors influencing the offer of SS, participants discussed methods of helping CH victims. Methods included offering practical support to ensure the victim could use the Internet in safer ways by ensuring their own online anonymity. However, this method would only protect individuals from strangers cyber-harassing them, and would not protect them from CH perpetrated by an acquaintance or friend who already had access to their

online contact details. Additionally, participants who said they would explain to the victim that CH was ‘not real’, may be trivalising the impact of CH on victims.

One of the most concerning findings of this study was that participants reported they would not be able to help a victim of CH if CH was considered to be severe. Arguably, it is those victims who suffer severe harassment who are most in need of SS to help reduce the impact of CH. Participants indicated they would seek information and further help for such individuals. However, there is a wealth of psychological literature examining bystander intervention that indicates individuals are likely to assume that others will assume responsibility for helping victims (Latane & Darley, 1969). Indeed, in relation to cyberbullying, Agatson, Kowalski, and Limber (2007) conducted focus groups with 150 adolescents, and reported they would be unlikely to report cyberbullying to others, and did not think adults could help victims. Arguably, whilst participants reported seeking help for victims of CH, research suggests this form of action may be unlikely.

Issues relating to SS may have serious repercussions on victims. The quality of SS victims receive may not adequately equip them to deal with their experiences and may prevent them from seeking SS. As SS has a buffering effect on stress (Yap & Devilly, 2004), if SS is lacking, CH may impact on victims to a greater extent.

6.4.3 Victim Blame

This study illustrated that participants blamed victims’ online behaviour for their experiences of CH. Victims were perceived to ignore warnings and advice relating to online safety, and were perceived to invite CH because of their online behaviour. One participant suggested that females may be more vulnerable to CH because they place more information on the Internet than males. Participants’ language served to distance them from experiencing CH as they would not engage in behaviours (such as posting substantial amounts of personal information on the Internet) participants believed victims engage in.

Receiving malicious software that can be used to access information held on one’s computer, or to damage one’s hardware or software is one example of a behaviour associated with CH and online paedophilia (Bocij, 2003; Dombrowski, LeMasney, Ahia &

Dickson, 2004). Whilst participants perceived malicious intent behind sending such software, participants did not believe sending malicious software constituted CH. However, participants believed that recipients of malicious software were responsible for receiving it as they opened a link which embedded the software or downloading the software.

Contrasting perceptions of CH victims, perpetrators were perceived as sad, lonely individuals who were unable to control their behaviour, and were often perceived as not intending to cause harm to the victim. Spitzberg and Cadaz (2002) considered similar language used in the media to portray perpetrators of crime, and suggests that perceiving the perpetrator as lacking control over their behaviour reduces the perpetrator's responsibility for their behaviour.

The findings of this study lend support to the just world hypothesis in relation to perceptions of CH victims and perpetrators. However, participants' perceptions that the CH victim is not likely to have a prior relationship with the perpetrator (i.e., they are strangers) may have complicated the findings. The findings of Sheridan et al. (2003) suggested participants are more likely to attribute blame to the victim when they have had a previous relationship (i.e., ex-intimates or acquaintances). The authors explained attribution of blame may be due to a presumed misdeed against the harasser, accounting for the onset of stalking. In contrast, participants in this study suggested CH was likely to occur between strangers. Thus, Sheridan et al.'s explanation does not account for the attribution of blame to victims by participants in this study.

However, Spitzberg and Cadaz (2002) suggest the media portray offline stalkers as strangers who premeditate stalking and are uncontrollable. This portrayal may be more pronounced in cases of CH, especially considering the anonymity afforded to Internet users. Perceptions that perpetrators of CH are strangers, protected by anonymity, may have heightened the threat that participants could be vulnerable to CH, and increased participants' need to make sense of such a situation. Consequently, presented with the potential threat, participants blamed victims' behaviour for their experiences of CH. By distancing their own behaviour from the perceived behaviour of victims, participants reassured themselves that they would not experience CH.

Lerner and Miller (1978) stipulate that individuals will not be concerned with injustices that relate to events that occur in environments that do not relate to their own life. However, participants in this study attributed responsibility to CH victims, rather than perpetrators, because of their online behaviour. Therefore, it is hypothesised that individuals who use the Internet to a high degree may be more likely to attribute responsibility to victims for their experiences of CH.

6.4.4 Implications

There are some implications arising from the findings of this study. In relation to victims of CH, the tendency to blame victims for their experiences of online harassment may have serious implications when prosecuting perpetrators. When defending perpetrators of CH in court, barristers and solicitors may emphasise victim responsibility for their experiences, whilst simultaneously portraying perpetrators as lonely, or mentally ill. Such defence tactics may encourage jurors to sympathise with perpetrators, and potentially render ‘not guilty’ verdicts.

The association of CH with cyberbullying and online sexual harassment may also prove problematic for victims. Both are specific forms of CH and may not equate to the majority of CH experiences. However, individuals may not recognise other forms of CH and as such, other forms of CH may be trivialised. As CH was perceived to be perpetrated by strangers, those who are harassed by someone they know may be especially vulnerable to trivialisation. Should trivialisation occur, victims of CH who do not fall under the umbrella of cyberbullying or online sexual harassment may not receive adequate support in dealing with their experiences. Trivialisation may also confound the distress experienced by victims.

The findings of this study reinforce the need to better educate people about CH. Specifically, campaigns to raise awareness should focus on the diversity of forms of CH, methods used by perpetrators in their campaign of CH, and the potential consequences of cyberstalking-by-proxy. Such campaigns should also address issues relating to intent requirements in the law, and the credibility of threats made in online communications.

6.4.5 Limitations

One of the strengths of this research was in gaining insights to undergraduate students' understanding and knowledge of CH without knowledge of anti-harassment legislation within the UK. However, this strength also contributes to a major limitation of this study as participants formed their own opinions about what CH is. As such, participants associated CH with cyberbullying, online sexual solicitation, and the use of the Internet by paedophiles. These early formed associations may have overshadowed subsequent questions about their perceptions of CH. As such, the themes generated in this study may relate specifically to these forms of CH.

When asked to think about victims of CH, participants were not provided with any information about victims. Consequently, the characteristics of the victim reported by participants is unclear. Victim characteristics (such as age, gender, prior relationship with the perpetrator and behaviours experienced) play an important role in shaping perceptions of victims. As evidenced in this study, the victim's age was perceived to be important, as participants perceived victim's less than 18 years to be more vulnerable to CH than older participants. Also, if strangers targeting victims is perceived as the norm for CH, victims who share a relationship with the perpetrator prior to the onset of CH may be perceived differently. Whilst this study failed to address such issues in more depth, it provides an important platform from which these issues can be fully explored.

6.4.6 Future Research

As cyber-harassed victims choose to use the Internet, they are vulnerable to being blamed for their experiences of CH. However, further exploration is needed to identify the variables associated with CH. One possible investigation could focus on the role of gender in victim-blaming tendencies. Just world research suggests males may be blamed more for their experiences because they are perceived as less likely to become victims. In addition, future research may benefit from manipulating the gender of the victim and perpetrator to examine interactions with victim blame. Similarly, individuals who use the Internet to a great extent may be held more responsible for cyber-harassing experiences than those who

use the Internet less. Future research would benefit from exploring the relationship between these two variables.

Furthermore, the conditions under which individuals are most likely to empathise with perpetrators are unclear. For example, it is logical to presume that ex-intimates who engage in CH may be perceived more sympathetically than strangers. However, such perceptions may not hold if ex-intimates try to conceal their identity. The interaction between anonymity and the prior victim-perpetrator relationship remains unexplored and also warrants further investigation. Such variables may be further confounded by the methods of CH used by perpetrators.

Finally, this study highlighted participants' concerns about the ability of police officers to adequately investigate cases involving CH, and the subsequent prosecution of perpetrators. The paucity of research available relating to these issues limited the discussion of these issues in this study. The majority of research in this field has concentrated on victims' accounts of their experiences of CH. Future research would benefit by obtaining data from police officers about their perceptions and experiences of dealing with cases involving CH. By doing so, researchers can provide a more holistic view of the phenomenon.

Chapter 7: Police Officers' perceptions and role in combating cyber-harassment

7.1 Introduction

Police officers' investigations of crimes are crucial in determining whether crime proceeds to the criminal prosecution of perpetrators. Despite anecdotal evidence from victims' accounts of police intervention in offline and online harassment, there has been little research exploring police officers' perceptions about cyber-harassment (CH). This study makes some attempt at addressing this gap by conducting semi-structured interviews with police officers to further understand their perceptions of CH, and their role in dealing with cases involving CH.

Wall (1998) advocates the 'transformation test' to establish whether cybercrimes are 'fake', 'hybrids', or 'true'. The 'transformation test' involves assessing the degree to which cybercrime translates to offline crime. According to Wall, 'fake' cybercrimes are offline crimes that masquerade as cybercrime; 'hybrid' cybercrimes are offline crimes that evolve and incorporate online methods that cannot be translated to offline behaviours; and 'true' cybercrimes that exist solely because of the Internet. CH is an example of Wall's 'hybrid' crime and can be prosecuted in the UK using the *Protection from Harassment Act* (1997). However, Basu and Jones (2007) criticise Wall's 'transformation test' on the basis that it has a 'diluting effect' on perceived severity and impact of cybercrime. Furthermore, they note that the Act predates common usage of the Internet in today's society, and argue that it is unlikely to adequately reduce instances of CH.

Whilst the Act is broad enough to allow for the prosecution of perpetrators of CH, it has been criticised because it does not define harassment, which can lead to ambiguity (Bocij, Griffiths & McFarlane, 2002). Furthermore, Salter and Bryden (2009) criticise the Act as a "blunt instrument, unwieldy and unsuited for a fast moving world" (p. 100). They argue that the Act does not provide protection against unidentifiable perpetrators, or perpetrators who live outside the jurisdiction of UK legislation. However, if CH is reported to the police, they investigate any allegations made against the perpetrator and forward their findings to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), who ultimately decide whether the case

should proceed to court. Whilst the Act does not define harassment (and, therefore, cyber-harassment), the CPS has defined cyberstalking as follows:

Cyberstalking generally takes the form of threatening behaviour or unwanted advances directed at another using the Internet and other forms of online communication. Cyberstalkers can target their victims through chat rooms, message boards, discussion forums and email. Cyberstalking can be carried out in a variety of ways such as: threatening or obscene e-mail; spamming (in which a stalker sends a victim a multitude of junk e-mail); live chat harassment or flaming (online verbal abuse); leaving improper messages on message boards or in guest books; sending electronic viruses; sending unsolicited e-mail; and electronic identity theft amongst others (O'Connell, Price & Barrow, 2004, p. 3).

At present, there appears to be no empirical research examining police officers' perceptions of cyber-harassment. However, Kamphius, Emmelkamp and deVries (2004) compared the views held by police officers and general practitioners from the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, and the UK about stalking. They presented participants with 12 stalking vignettes that varied in severity, the prior victim-perpetrator relationship, intrusiveness, and frequency. They then asked participants to complete a 34-item attitudinal questionnaire. In relation to police officers' perceptions, they found that all the police officers normalised stalking behaviours and they suggested this was due to their exposure of criminal activity. Additionally, Dutch and English police officers were least likely to attribute blame to the victims of stalking, and English police officers were most likely to believe that dealing with stalking was part of their job. Whilst some vignettes depicted cyber-harassing behaviours, the authors did not distinguish officers' perceptions of offline harassment compared to online harassment. However, the results indicated that UK police officers may be sympathetic towards victims of CH, and may be likely to take reports of CH seriously.

Evidence suggests that few victims of offline harassment report their experiences to the police (e.g., Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Fremouw, Westrup & Pennypacker, 1997; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998) and that similar patterns are emerging among victims of CH (e.g. Finn, 2004). Fremouw et al. (1997) reported that undergraduate students who experienced offline stalking were most likely to ignore or confront the stalker, with males more likely to confront the stalker than females. In another study using the vignette method, Hills and Taplin (1998) found that females were more likely to report offline harassment to the

police than males, and this effect was greater if threatening behaviours were depicted in the vignettes. In relation to CH, Alexy, Burgess, Baker and Smoyak (2005) found that just under a third of undergraduate students in their study (31.5%) reported their experiences to the police or Internet Service Providers (ISPs). These studies highlight more needs to be done to encourage victims to report harassment to the police.

Many victims of offline harassment who do report their experiences to the police report dissatisfaction with the action taken by police officers (Pathé & Mullen, 1997; Sheridan, Davies & Boon, 2001a). Reasons for dissatisfaction include dismissal because the situation is perceived as a 'domestic', police officers' refusal to help, disbelief and/or powerlessness of police officers, ineffectiveness of warnings, arrests, and restraining orders, and perceived inaction on police officers behalf (Blaauw, Winkel, Arensman, Sheridan & Freeve, 2002; Draucker, 1999; Morris, Anderson & Murray, 2002; Roberts & Dziegielewski, 1996; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Similar reports have been given by victims of cyber-harassment, with reports that police officers have told victims to turn off their computer, or there is insufficient evidence to proceed with criminal proceedings (Burgess & Baker, 2002; Finn, 2004; Griffiths, 1999). Such reports indicate an ineffectiveness of police officers in dealing with offline and online harassment. However, the research that indicated police officers tell cyber-harassed victims to turn off their computer dates back to the early 2000s. The rapid evolution of the Internet and the corresponding evolution of attitudes and understanding of online behaviour may render such research outdated. Such findings highlight the need to further understand police officers' perceptions of CH, and explore problems they may encounter when dealing with such cases.

Reports that cases involving CH have been dismissed on the grounds of insufficient evidence are of concern because it reinforces the invulnerability of perpetrators. One potential problem is the apprehension of perpetrators using evidence gathered via the Internet. Although the police can trace the perpetrator's IP address, evidence gathered leads to a computer, and it may not be possible to connect a specific person to the computer used to harass another individual (Bocij, 2004; Griffiths, Rogers & Sparrow, 1998). In contrast, evidence-gathering may be easier if the perpetrator uses the Internet as Wall (1998) explains "the collection (and retention) of Internet traffic data is particularly

significant because records of every Internet transaction that takes place can now exist” (p. 91). Furthermore, Salter and Bryden (2009) noted Internet Service Providers (ISPs), instant messaging (IM), and email providers are able to trace the physical addresses relating to the computer used to send cyber-harassing messages. They also provided an example that illustrates the possibility of tracing individuals who use anonymous email addresses and public computers. A barrister, Bruce Hyman, sent false legal documents to an individual his client had initiated legal proceedings against regarding visitation rights and residential matters of a child born to his client and the individual. When the father produced the false documents in court, Mr Hyman alleged the father was trying to mislead the court. The father discovered the emails were sent from a cyber-cafe and police officers identified Hyman using CCTV footage. Thus, the burden of proof may be easier to establish in cases involving cyber-harassment compared to offline harassment. However, tracing the perpetrator of CH may prove expensive, and as Basu and Jones (2007) warn, the police may not have the resources or technology to do so.

Internet users may be required to utilise self-protective strategies when online to minimise vulnerability to CH. Cyber-harassed victims may be warned to avoid online spaces in order to avoid the perpetrator, or may be advised to ‘block’ the perpetrator (O’Connell, Price & Barrow, 2004). Whilst avoiding online spaces might infringe on the victim’s right to use the Internet and online spaces (Bocij, 2004), individuals protect themselves on a regular basis in the offline world (Basu & Jones, 2007).

Blocking the cyber-harassing perpetrator is a form of cyber-ostracism that Wall and Williams (2007) suggest may be effective in regulating Internet users’ behaviour. They equate cyber-ostracism to shaming punishments recorded in the Middle Ages (such as putting a person in the stocks). They suggest that cyber-ostracism may invoke shame in perpetrators whereby they “are made to feel discomfort as a result of internal guilt triggered by classical conditioning” (p. 405). Wall and Williams were describing the process of shaming when perpetrators are involved in an online community. In a community setting, perpetrators may have a desire to remain involved in the community and cyber-ostracism may be more effective in such online spaces. A further caveat may apply to cyber-harassers who are infatuated with their target, whereby blocking perpetrators may encourage such perpetrators to find other means to communicate with the

target. Indeed, Salter and Bryden (2009) highlight the determined perpetrator is likely to find alternative methods to pursue the victim. Thus, cyber-harassment that has remained online may be forced offline in order to satisfy the perpetrator's obsession.

7.1.1 Rationale

The preceding overview highlights that empirical research is needed to ascertain police officers' perceptions of CH, and of its victims. Victims' accounts paint a bleak picture of the inability of police officers to tackle CH. However, some victims' reports may be due to frustration and lack of knowledge about police procedures. Few studies have investigated police officers' perceptions about this crime, their role in dealing with CH, and their perceptions of victims. By addressing this gap in knowledge, researchers will be in a better position to inform victims of police procedures, and victims can be made more knowledgeable about what they can expect if they report CH. Such knowledge may empower victims and may contribute to the crime being reported more. Furthermore, if police procedures are inadequate in dealing with the problem, researchers will be in a better position to inform the authorities about measures that can be taken to address any issues.

7.1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

The key objectives of this study were to: 1) explore police officers' perceptions of cyber-harassment, and in particular, their perceptions of victims; 2) explore how participants perceive their role in supporting and protecting individuals from cyber-harassment; and 3) evaluate the support given to victims of CH by police officers.

7.2 Method

7.2.1 Participants

Eight police officers from the Nottinghamshire Police Force participated in this study, comprising of one female and seven males aged between 26 and 55 years ($M = 38$ years; $SD = 10$ years). Participants had an average of 14.1 ($SD = 9.6$) years of service within the

police force. All participants were self-selected volunteers, and were not intended to form a representative sample of police officers. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants, and although this sampling method compromises the validity of research by introducing sampling bias, it proved a convenient way to recruit police officers who can be difficult to recruit. This was particularly relevant in this study as the research utilised semi-structured interviews that can be lengthy. As letters and e-mails were sent to various police departments, it was impossible to provide response rates as there is no way to know who received the recruitment letters and emails.

Table 25: Participants' Demographic Information for Study 4

Participant's pseudonyms	Age	Years of Service
Adam	38	10
Amanda	41	8
Brendan	26	2
David	26	6
Declan	37	15
Jake	55	29
Joseph	36	17
Thomas	47	26

7.2.2 Measures

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' perceptions of CH. In a deviation from other studies in this thesis, interviews were conducted face-to-face or via the telephone. Considering the interview topic and participants' profession, it was felt that online interviews may not have adequately established and reassured participants of the researcher's identity. Police officers, because of their profession and experiences in dealing with CH, may be more cautious of discussing police procedures in an online space; such data may be recorded by other Internet bodies (such as ISPs) and may not meet the levels of confidentiality participants require. Furthermore, building rapport with participants prior to an online interview can be a lengthy process for which police officers may not have the time. The interview schedule consisted of five questions addressing their perceptions of CH, their role in dealing with cases involving CH, and how individuals can be protected from CH. Although there was an interview schedule, the interviews were semi-structured, giving participants the freedom to discuss issues they perceived relevant to the topic.

7.2.3 Procedure

Various recruitment strategies were utilised for this study. First, police officers known to friends and associates of the researcher were approached to participate in the study. Second, the researcher visited branches of the Nottinghamshire Police Force to explain the study. Information about the study and the researcher's contact details were left with the branches but this strategy proved fruitless. Third, letters were sent to specific departments and officers within the Nottinghamshire Police Force that briefly explained the study and provided the researcher's contact details. All police officers who participated confirmed their interest by contacting the researcher to request more information about the study. When police officers agreed to participate, they were asked whether they would prefer to conduct the interview face-to-face or via the telephone, and a time, date, and place (where relevant) was arranged. Six participants chose to conduct the interview face-to-face and two participants chose to participate via the telephone.

Recruitment and data collection took place over a 12-week period. For the face-to-face interviews, participants were provided with background and information about the study, and given the opportunity to ask the researcher any questions before providing their informed consent. Following consent, the interview began and following the interview participants were thanked and debriefed.

For the telephone interviews, background and information about the study was sent to participants via email, along with a consent form. Participants read the information prior to the telephone interview, asked any questions they had about the study and provided their consent. When the researcher telephoned them, they were asked if they had any further questions, and consent was requested again. The interview then commenced and debriefing was given at the end of the interview. Contact was maintained with all participants via email throughout the data analysis period.

7.2.4 Analysis

Following data collection, the data was transcribed from the recorded audio to *Microsoft Word*. The font for all transcripts was maintained using Times New Roman font, size 12

with 1.5 line spacing, and the transcripts were fully anonymised. The transcripts ranged from 5-30 pages ($M = 12$; $SD = 7.9$).

The data were analysed using thematic analysis as described in the previous chapter (see Table 24 for a description of the analytical process). Thematic analysis was deemed most appropriate as there is little known about police officers' perceptions of cyber-harassment, and thematic analysis is appropriate for exploring novel topics. As police officers were not discussing their personal lived experiences of cyber-harassment, interpretative phenomenological analysis was not an appropriate analytical method for this study.

7.3 Results

Three themes were identified during data analysis: 'accessibility', 'threat', and 'the unhelpful victim'. Each of the themes will be considered, and excerpts from the transcripts are provided to allow for the assessment of interpretations.

7.3.1 Theme 1: Accessibility

'*Accessibility*' was the first theme identified in this study. Participants discussed the accessibility of the Internet which participants believed encouraged individuals to engage in CH, the accessibility of the Internet provided perpetrators with the means and opportunity to locate victims, victims' information, and their friends and/or family. Participants also discussed the accessibility to information and advice, should individuals be faced with cyber-harassment. Finally, participants discussed the accessibility of evidence which police officers could access to build up a case against perpetrators.

There was consensus among participants that the Internet is becoming more accessible for people, and emphasised the rapid evolution of technology to assist individuals to be connected to the Internet regardless of where they are. David's transcript emphasises individuals' access to social networking sites, which participants believed were the main tools used by perpetrators in their campaign of CH against a victim. David also emphasised a digital divide between younger and older individuals. When David suggested older individuals 'let things lie' and younger people 'don't realise the consequences about doing

something', he implied CH is a consequence of offline confrontation that is continued in cyberspace. By assuming this position, David suggested younger individuals are less knowledgeable about the consequences their actions have. It was not clear whether David was alluding to consequences CH has for the victim, or the perpetrator.

"I think, you know with the way mobile phone technology is going now, people have got these networking sites on the go, they're there at the touch of a button...older people tend to let things lie where young people they don't realise the consequences about doing something." **David**

Whilst discussing a specific case involving cyberstalking, Thomas described a perpetrator who accessed the Internet consistently, to the point it became all-consuming. The perpetrator's life consisted of working and using the Internet. Thomas' description began and ended with emphasis on the perpetrator's usage of the Internet, which may indicate some form of addiction.

"He would literally go to work, come home switch the computer on, and stay on it all night and into the early hours of the morning, switch it off, get on the computer again, go out, because he works shifts, go on it till he goes to work. And that's all he ever did." **Thomas**

Accessibility to the Internet was associated with increased access to victims. Participants believed high levels of online disclosure of personal information leaves individuals vulnerable to abuse, including CH. Joseph's excerpt illustrated that perpetrators can easily access information about the victim, and the victim's friends. Thus, cyberstalking-by-proxy is made easier; particularly as social networking sites provide a central location from which perpetrators can get information. Importantly, Joseph noted individuals would not have been able to access personal information about another person if access to the Internet and in particular, social networking sites was not available. For Joseph, the amount of information individuals place on social networking sites increases vulnerability to being harassed offline, especially if victims are well-known in the area they live in.

"As long as everyone can get access to it [*Facebook*], you know, looking at friends' profiles, seeing their friends with someone else, they can get too much off, on these sites. You wouldn't have that information. It's the friends as well...If it's in an area where you are known, if you're living in a small place or I just think you're just too easy to find, you're just leaving yourself wide open for anything really." **Joseph**

Thomas also described how a perpetrator gathered information about his victim with relative ease. When describing the journal the victim placed on the Internet, Thomas said the victim ‘actually’ posted the journal, and emphasised it was ‘really really in-depth’. This use of language indicated Thomas’ disbelief at the level of detail the victim disclosed online. Emphasis on the victim’s online behaviour is further illustrated when he used the word ‘she’ six times within one sentence. The perpetrator also engaged in cyberstalking-by-proxy and Thomas described the perpetrator writing a suicide note for another victim, Y, which included a lot of information about Y’s family. Thomas’ excerpt concluded with questioning how the perpetrator got the information. However, Thomas answered this question previously in the excerpt by emphasising the victims’ level of online self-disclosure. Thus, Thomas is not pondering the answer to the question but tried to ensure the interviewer arrived at the same conclusion. That is, the attribution of blame lies with victims because of their online self-disclosure.

“Ms. A. [victim] actually posted a journal which X [perpetrator] looks at...And it’s like really really in-depth... what he [perpetrator] started to do...was, he’d ask one person one thing... And he would get all of that and he’d pull all of that information together and before you knew it, he knew everything about them...he knew he would’ve found them because of looking through Google maps and other things and research on the Internet...He would have definitely found them. But, erm, he gets her mobile number off *Facebook* and again, she made a mistake, right, she, when she posted her things, she said, she tells us this, she says ‘I put it all on *Facebook*, I put everything on there and then and then he rings and I go whoops, hang on, mistake’...X [perpetrator] writing a suicide note for Y [victim]...and the interesting thing about this and some of the scary stuff about it was that X knew ‘tell all my family I love them’ but knew who all his family were ‘but especially Z’ and Z is Y’s brother’s son. So his nephew. And how did he get all that information?” **Thomas**

Like Joseph, Thomas believed individuals’ online self-disclosure make it easier for perpetrators to locate their victim offline. However, Thomas did not focus on how well-known the victim is in the area they live. Rather, Thomas described other methods perpetrators can use to locate their victim. The victims Thomas described were members of an online forum and had been ‘chatting’ to other forum users for a period of time, and developed relationships with the forum users. The perpetrator was also a member of the forum and used the relationships he had developed with other users to collate information

about the victims he was pursuing. Thomas emphasised the perpetrator's intelligence when he explained the perpetrator asked 'one person one thing'. By restricting his questioning, the perpetrator ensured other forum users would not recognise that he was gathering information on the victims. The perpetrator was given the victims' address by another forum user but Thomas believed the perpetrator would, eventually, have found their address by researching the area in which the victims lived in conjunction with information he had obtained, and using *Google Maps* to find where they lived. This highlighted that divulging information to other Internet users and on social networking sites can ultimately give perpetrators access to large amounts of information on their victims.

Joseph's excerpt (p. 203) included the interesting statement that 'it's the friends as well' that can lead to vulnerability of being cyber-harassed. Although he did not elaborate on what he meant, David's excerpt served to further illustrate this point.

"A lot of people are just getting friends and friends and friends for no apparent reason. And allowing every Tom, Dick and Harry to visit their site, to be able to leave things and to do this and to do that. It's just making yourself more of a, more of a target really." **David**

David believed that accumulating 'friends' on social networking sites was associated with vulnerability to being cyber-harassed. In the first sentence of his excerpt, the repetitive use of the word 'friends' indicated the large amounts of 'friends' people gather on their social networking sites. By following 'friends' with 'every Tom, Dick or Harry', David emphasised that the friends gathered on social networking sites are not really friends of the individual. 'Tom, Dick or Harry' is a cultural phrase that, in this context, highlighted the uncontrolled, unknown properties of social networking 'friends' who are invited into individuals' lives on the basis of the individual trying to appear popular rather than an exclusive group of friends.

Finally, participants believed the accessibility to victims via the Internet and mobile phone technology provided the opportunity for ex-partners to engage in harassing behaviours. In this respect, participants associated some instances of cyber-harassment with domestic violence.

“The ones that...I’ve heard about or experienced have been emails where...it was an ex partner who was sending these emails through...and some of the content was rather unpleasant.” **Declan**

“Text messages and things as well. Erm, they’re about mainly when it’s eh, a couple of have split up. They’ll receive two hundred texts – where are you, what are you doing?” **Joseph**

Declan emphasised the content of emails was upsetting for victims, whereas Joseph believed it was the quantity of messages received that upset victims. It may be the form (emails vs. text messages) that determines whether the quantity or content of messages is disturbing. Many people have their mobile phone with them at all times, giving perpetrators immediate access to their victim. In contrast, individuals can choose to log on to their email account as often or as little as they desire. Via email, the perpetrator’s social presence is reduced and they may have to send messages that are more abusive or threatening than they would via text message. The social presence of the perpetrator is increased in text messages because of the immediacy of access to victims. Thus, large quantities of text messages that are less threatening will have a severe impact on the victim.

All participants emphasised that evidence can be recovered from the victim’s computer despite the deletion of evidence. Jake began by focusing on his abilities but made it clear that his abilities do not cause problems for forensically examining computers. He mentioned the victim will have to wait for evidence to be recovered, but focused on the positive result of recovering evidence. Despite warnings by researchers the evidence trail ends with a computer and not a person, Jake was certain the perpetrator cannot abdicate responsibility for messages received by the victim.

“I’m not that technical with computers but I know we’ve got technicians that can get all, it doesn’t matter if you press delete, doesn’t mean it’s gone. So, our technicians can recover that information. If you seize it, obviously there’s a waiting list, so you’ll have to wait but they can recall that information and prove where it’s come from. So the evidence is already there and that person can’t deny, you know they could say ‘well I didn’t send it’ but you’ve allowed someone to use your computer to send it.” **Jake**

David stressed that victims should delete their social networking profile and report abuse to the website owners. Like Jake, David emphasised the ease with which police officers can gather evidence in cases of CH. However, David explained the evidence would be retrieved from the website owners, rather than a computer, as keeping copies of all Internet traffic is a legal requirement. David's use of language suggested he perceived it possible to track anonymous perpetrators with this method of evidence gathering. Like Jake, David stressed the lengthy process of obtaining information from website owners, as he explained global requests may be received by a website owner which increases the website owners' workload. He repeated 'the information is there' which solidified his perception that evidence can be sought, is retrievable, and cyber-harassing perpetrators can be brought to justice. However, victims must be aware of the lengthy process involved.

"You can take steps yourself in the first instance, you know, completely wipe your profile, perhaps bar a particular person from contacting you, report the abuse, don't feel afraid to report the abuse. The thing is once somebody types it in, it's there, it's logged, *Facebook* and *Bebo*, they all log it. They have to by law... they'll provide us with the information to do with IP addresses things like that, or email addresses and we're then able to request the information to establish who that particular person is. I mean, its a long bit of work but it has to be done correctly for us to get that information...So it's all there, so it's not a case of you not being believed, it's all there... if you imagine it worldwide, all approaching *Facebook* from which ever country they're in, then obviously it takes time for that information to come through. But the information is there. The information is there, it's just a case of waiting for it. It's not like I can have it, say, within 48 hours, that's not going to happen." **David**

The case Thomas discussed provided a working example of how police officers obtain information from individuals' computers. In the first sentence of his excerpt, he stated 'we do it to death'. This use of language emphasised the perpetrator's computer was interrogated 'to death', meaning there was nothing left to find on the computer. The finality of this word is emphasised as he iterated the police knew 'everything' the perpetrator had done using his computer. The use of the word 'death' is particularly poignant in this case as the perpetrator murdered one of his victims (Victim B); suggesting the police ended the perpetrator's life, as the perpetrator had done to Victim B.

"We know because we've got X's [perpetrator] computer and we do it to death, and we know exactly everything that he does forensically, everything. He begins to look at her on *Facebook* and starts, and then he

starts to talking about her [victim A] journal that she's posted as well...what we know is he started to get pictures of her and he started talking to her about the fact...What we knew at that time, which was basically May was that he was in contact with two other women as well. One lived in Belgium and one lived in America and he was talking to both of them throughout all of this as well...These are like the one sided texts that A [Victim A] and C [friend of Victim A] send, and we only got them, we didn't get them off both phones, so we don't know exactly what she was saying but these are here... as part of the evidence trail, we researched all of the chat room stuff that went on over this period of time. If we had printed it off, it was 70,000 pages of stuff. We've got lots of it but there's 70,000 pages of chat room, and I'll show some in a bit. Its masses... our computer wiz kid found out is that while he's doing that [booking flights], he's also re-reading other letters, like they 'Undying Love' letter. So, I'm having a chat, I'm booking the thing, I'm re-reading stuff, all in there, in the middle of a heated debate [with Victim B]. So it's some good stuff there." **Thomas**

Thomas' excerpt illustrated the behaviours used by a cyberstalking perpetrator and the fact that officers involved in this case were able to retrieve the perpetrator's behavioural patterns, and use this evidence to prosecute the perpetrator. Thomas described the early formation of the relationship between the perpetrator and Victim A. The officers retrieved information that the perpetrator was harassing two other women. By stating where the other two women lived, Thomas highlighted that victims do not have to live geographically close to the perpetrator to be harassed. Thomas also described obtaining evidence from mobile phones but officers could obtain information from one phone. The fact that information could not be obtained from both phones suggested police officers may face greater difficulties when retrieving evidence from mobile phones than from the Internet.

Thomas continued to describe the retrieval of evidence from chat rooms. This point was interesting as the general public may not be aware that logs of 'chats' are kept. However, Thomas noted the evidence amounted to 70,000 pages if it was printed off, and confirmed it was 'masses' of information. This alluded to the task of police officers faced with reading and selecting evidence relevant to a case.

Finally, Thomas finished by describing the perpetrator's last computer usage prior to murdering Victim B. Police officers were able to ascertain the perpetrator was simultaneously organising travel, 'chatting' to someone online, re-reading letters previously drafted, and having a 'heated debate' with Victim B. There are four interesting

points relevant to this section of Thomas' transcript. First, Thomas' description changed to the first person when describing the perpetrator's behaviour. This led to submersion in the perpetrator's world, and the rapid description of all the behaviours the perpetrator was engaging in created a chaotic feel, alluding to Thomas' perception of the perpetrator's mind at that particular point in time. Second, engaging in simultaneous behaviours distinguishes cyberstalking from offline stalking. It is unlikely, if not impossible, for the offline stalker to read letters, chat to someone, have a heated argument with another person, and make travel arrangements all at the same time. It may be that the Internet provides the perpetrator the opportunity to submerge him- or herself in their own world, during which time they can feed their obsession with readily available information they have gathered. Third, the transcript illustrated the accessibility to 1) victims, 2) information about victims, 3) tools the perpetrator may use in their campaign against a victim or victims, and 4) evidence. Finally, gathering evidence in cyberstalking cases requires a variety of skilled officers. Whilst evidence is accessible to police officers, retrieving and sorting through evidence would require considerable resources in terms of manpower and time.

7.3.2 Theme 2: Threat

'Threat' was second theme identified during data analyses. It included issues of safety, intent, carrying out threats, harm, severity and seizure of computers.

Declan focused on the dichotomy of online versus offline safety, with particular attention to the safety of children in using the Internet. Using the example of parents wanting to know where their children are, and who they are with, David implied offline safety measures to protect children are common knowledge. David compared the knowledge of who children are with offline does not translate easily to their communications with other Internet users. Although David posed the questions of who children are talking to, and what information they are giving, the questions are rhetorical rather than genuine questions. The majority of participants shared the perception that individuals are more willing or aware of how to protect themselves offline but are not as knowledgeable when communicating with strangers via the Internet.

“A lot of parents probably don’t realise the potential risks of it [the Internet]. It’s like you wouldn’t let your child go and stay somewhere over night at a house if you didn’t know the people, to my mind. You’d make sure you’d know where they were going and who the people were, and feel comfortable with that. But, with the computer or on the phone, do parents really know who their kids are talking to? And also, what information are they divulging?” **Declan**

The majority of participants considered the perpetrator’s intention to cause harm to the victim as crucial when investigating cases involving CH. Jake noted that threats made by a perpetrator to the victim cannot be disregarded until intent has been determined. Adam also focused on intent by explaining that if a perpetrator is issued with a harassment warning, and then fails to stop harassing the victim, intent is established. The reasonable persons test is used by jurors to establish whether the perpetrator knew their behaviour amounted to harassment. Thus, issuing a harassment notice serves to prove, in court, that the perpetrator knows their behaviour amounts to harassment. However, rather than focusing on this purpose of the harassment notice, Adam considered the purpose of the harassment notice being to establish intent.

“You can’t take a threat as not a threat until you think it’s totally totally explicit you know and you’d find that out by working with that person and find out exactly what their intention is.” **Jake**

“You go, serve this notice to them and then they knew ‘alright, this, what I’ve been doing was harassment’. So if they continue after that, then they can get reported for it and arrested and dealt with.” **Adam**

Whilst the perpetrator’s intention is not a requisite of the *PfHA*, Declan considered intent in relation to the Act. More severe instances of harassment can be prosecuted under section 4 of the Act, and requires that the victim is fearful that acts of violence would be carried out against them. Thus, Declan considered intent to be required to establish that the perpetrator intended to put the victim in fear of violence, regardless of his/her willingness or ability to carry out acts of violence.

“[For] some offences, the intent is to put a person in fear that other offences would be carried out. You may not necessarily ever intend to actually commit only through the commission of those offences but put in that thought into your intended victim’s mind is enough.” **Declan**

Participants described perpetrators issuing threats to victims using the Internet and mobile phone technology. Thomas described a perpetrator who threatened to commit suicide in front of his victim. Throughout Thomas' description, he stressed the perpetrator threatened to do 'silly' things to himself and 'that's that'. His use of language suggested he perceived the perpetrator's threats to harm himself as trivial. However, in the last sentence of this excerpt, this perpetrator murdered someone close to the object of his obsession. When reading some of the perpetrator's transcripts of 'chats' to the victim, the perpetrator said 'I'm going to do something serious, something serious is going to happen, I have a knife'. Although the perpetrator's explicit threats indicated he would harm himself, the suggestion of 'something serious' happening and mentioning that he had a knife, in retrospect, allude to something more sinister and may be an example of a veiled threat against the victim.

"They were threats to eh, he was going to come to the UK, he was kill himself in front of her, erm, erm, "you don't know what I'm going to do, I'm going to do something serious, something serious is going to happen, I have a knife", just things like that really. Never really directly threatened to seriously harm B [victim]. Never really that. More threatened to do silly things to himself and it'd be their fault... on the 14th she [Victim A] finally blocks him, he threatens to come and kill himself and that's that. The only time, so that's the [date], that's four, five days before the murder."

Thomas

According to participants, direct threats to harm victims were taken as 'more serious' offences that are not dealt with under the *PfHA*. As David explained, he had not dealt with a case under section 4 of the Act, and threats to kill a victim are dealt with using other pieces of legislation. This is further illustrated by Adam's description whereby he treated a threat to harm a victim using legislation to prosecute strategies aimed at intimidating witnesses. This raises a fundamental question; if threatening violence against victims of harassment is dealt with using other criminal Acts, what is the purpose of section 4 of the *PfHA*?

"So somebody gets a text saying "you know if you go to court" and "you would get", and indirectly there were threats and basically they got scared and reported it to the police...we classed it as witness intimidation." **Adam**

"I've never had section 4 before. I've had threats to kill but there's other things that you can do. But, it's treated as a more serious offence." **David**

Police officers' perceptions of cyber-harassment were discussed by some participants. David's excerpt appeared complex as he began with a hypothetical threat that could be directed at a victim via the Internet. The next sentence refers to 'you' perceiving that differently compared to someone saying they are receiving abusive messages via the Internet. The 'you' whom David was referring to appeared to be police officers who would interpret something the victim reports to them. Thus, the focus changes from threats a perpetrator might make to the way a victim describes such threats when reporting CH to the police. This indicated the manner in which victims report cyber-crime to the police directly impacts on police officers' perceptions of the crime, and whether and how the crime is dealt with.

"It could be 'I'm coming round right now to kick your head in'. Well you might read that in a completely different way than perhaps you would if someone said 'look I'm having problems on the Internet, I'm getting messages, quite a lot of messages, they're just abusive'." **David**

Thomas focused on how the police would have responded if the victim had reported cyberstalking to the police. When considering what the response of police may have been, Thomas believed that a perpetrator living in another country would be presumed by police officers as unlikely to harm a victim living in the UK. He further illustrated this point by suggesting that if the perpetrator lived in the same country, police officers would be more likely to offer the victim support and advice. The tone of Thomas' excerpt appeared uncomfortable which may reflect the difficulty he perceived in considering a hypothetical scenario. An alternative explanation is the possibility that police officers would not have acted to protect the victim contravenes police officers' ethos as protectors. He repeated twice in this extract that 'young' police officers would be responsible for not acting on such a complaint. This emphasis on 'young' highlights the lack of experience young officers may have, and served to distance him from such a scenario.

"I don't want to shoot ourselves in the foot really but most PCs on the front counter come and see, would have not really have seen, like nobody would, but most of our young PCs would've gone "alright, let us know if it gets any worse. Oh he lives in [another country], he'll never come". So I anticipate that it wouldn't have been that great, I'm speaking hypothetically here but you never know. And certainly, talking about giving people advice, if they had've said "well I live here and he lives in Derby and whatever", we'd have said "right, get rid of your *Facebook*,

close your *Facebook* down, start a new *Facebook* as somebody else, don't post on the net, become anonymous, can we try and get your flat moved?" You know she was working and he was seeking. You know if he's been here, you'd have gone through it. I'm not too much, too sure, how much our young cops would've done but at least we'd have had an opportunity."

Thomas

The accessibility of gathering evidence in cases involving CH relies on accessing the victim or perpetrator's computer. However, participants noted that seizing computers for interrogation and gathering evidence would depend on the perceived severity of cases. Joseph said issuing harassment warnings was offered for 'extreme' cases of CH, and he had never dealt with a case whereby the seizure of computers was required.

"In extreme cases we offer things like harassment warnings. I've never actually had the extremes of seizing computers, find out IP addresses. No-one has taken it that far." **Joseph**

Like Joseph, Adam considered the seizure of computers and the speed with which evidence would be gathered would depend on the severity of the crime. He stated that harassment is not a serious crime, and whilst seizing computers in cases involving CH was not ruled out, he conceded the focus of the unit in the police force that would deal with computer interrogation would be on more serious crimes. Whilst Adam thought the unit would take approximately six weeks to interrogate a computer, other participants perceived a lengthier timescale. For example, as can be seen in the following excerpt, Declan considered six to eight months a reasonable timescale for the interrogation of a computer.

"Everything gets prioritised depending on what the crime is. For example, if it's something serious like murder, it gets dealt with a lot quicker than your, something minor, harassment type of a job. I'm afraid it won't get put to the top of the list. Another job, one of the more serious jobs, you have to submit an application form to the department that interrogates computers and send it off and it does take, I would say, I think, a good six weeks for it to get looked at." **Adam**

"I know it's a good few months from submitting something for forensic analysis, you know you wouldn't expect to hear anything for 6 to 8 months maybe." **Declan**

All participants considered the severity of the perpetrator's behaviour as crucial in determining whether a computer would be seized. However, David noted an important

caveat – although computers can be seized and interrogated as part of evidence gathering, the seizure of computers cannot prevent individuals from being cyber-harassed.

“We will seize computers if we need to on both sides as part of the investigation process. We just can’t take them off them to prevent things happening.” **David**

7.3.3 Theme 3: The Unhelpful Victim

‘*The unhelpful victim*’ was the final theme that emerged from the data. This theme comprised of issues relating to the behaviour of the cyber-harassed victim which participants considered unhelpful, frustrating, and undermining of police officers’ roles when dealing with perpetrators.

Joseph’s excerpt powerfully highlighted the unwillingness of victims to follow through with their complaint of CH against the perpetrator. He explained victims want their complaint logged but refuse to allow officers to investigate any incidents they report. His use of negative language served to emphasise the obstacles victims present to cases. Throughout his extract, the tone is one of frustration that implied he feels that victims are wasting police officers time. However, at the end of the extract he said that it caused him concern.

“The majority of the time they [victims] won’t take the complaint, they’ll tell us about it but then they’ll be unwilling to actually go forth their complaint. So they’ll say I just want to make you aware of this, but I don’t want to do anything about it. It is quite a hindrance in terms of well I then can’t go and speak to this person because you’re unwilling to go pen to paper, unwilling to back that information up. It makes it really informal, you know it’s, it is worrying.” **Joseph**

Like Joseph, Jake stated victims are unlikely to allow police officers to pursue their investigations of cases involving cyber-harassment between individuals who have, or had, a romantic relationship. Jake’s explanation is closely aligned with descriptions of domestic violence. This indicated cyber-harassing cases that involve individuals who have, or had a romantic relationship, the victim will be less likely to follow through with their harassment allegations.

“You go to arrest them and sometimes they start to resist and the partner who has been harassed suddenly pleading with the police officer to leave them alone because you know they love them.” **Jake**

Participants noted cyber-harassed victims are unwilling to change their online behaviour which they viewed as an important step in combating CH. Joseph’s excerpt echoes the frustration from the last excerpt during which he discussed the unhelpful victim who would not follow through with their allegations of harassment. In this excerpt, Joseph’s repetition of victims who he described as ‘unwilling to help themselves’ highlighted his frustration with victims who are unwilling to leave social networking sites, change their mobile phone numbers, contact service providers, or block the perpetrator from contacting them.

“The majority of the people are unwilling to leave the social networking sites...they’re unwilling to help themselves. I know that sounds a bit harsh but they’re unwilling to help themselves... They’re unwilling to change, completely unwilling to change and they just want the police to speak with the other party and make them aware that the police are involved. In fairness in the majority of the time that does help a bit but usually perhaps when they are unwilling to block that person or to change their phone number, or to contact their service provider, such as a mobile phone service provider and get a number blocked, they just are unwilling to do it.” **Joseph**

Like Jake, David also expressed frustration and annoyance with victims who refused to change their online behaviour following their experiences of CH. With further explanation, David illustrated that his frustration was based on the problems victims may face if their case proceeded to court. David imagined that the defence for the perpetrator would focus on the victim not changing his/her behaviour and using it as evidence that the victim was not upset by their experience of CH. By failing to change one’s online behaviour, the victim’s behaviour may undermine the work police officers have done to bring a case to court.

“I find it really frustrating because I know that will be at the heart of a defence, the defence will be turning around and saying “you’re not being entirely truthful” or “why did you not take yourself off *Facebook*. If you’re saying you’re so scared, why did you not take yourself off *Facebook*?” Yeah? It’s that sort of thing. “Why did you not take yourself out of the situation, why have you carried on? I put it to you that you’re not that scared at all, it’s not causing you any problems, you’re actually enjoying it and you’re doing this to get at my client”.” **David**

The excerpt above provided by Joseph included reference to the act of ‘blocking’ perpetrators from contacting victims. The majority of participants in this study argued this online feature is a powerful tool that can be used to prevent any unwanted contact whilst online. Thomas was the only participant who proposed that ‘blocking’ may act as a catalyst for cyber-harassment to escalate and move it offline, increasing the threat posed to victims. The victim described by Thomas was reluctant to block the perpetrator’s contact attempts because it would be ‘like lighting the blue touch paper’, meaning it would invoke the perpetrator’s anger. Using an offline analogy, Thomas compared blocking to ostracising individuals from contact with friends offline. He continues by stating that blocking a perpetrator fuelled the perpetrator’s anger towards the victim. Thomas also noted the perpetrator found methods to get around blocking, by using other Internet users to forward messages to the intended recipient on their behalf. Finally, Thomas described how the act of blocking acted as a catalyst for the perpetrator to contact the victim using methods more aligned with offline harassment (i.e., phone calls). This example illustrated that victims should be aware that whilst blocking may end cyber-harassment, it may also escalate the perpetrator’s behaviour.

“They use the phrase blocking him where you know, but they don’t really block him and A [victim] was explaining in court that she knew she knew “if I block him, actually that’s like lighting the blue touch paper”. And what we’d liken that to is this - I’ve got a whole series of real friends and if every time one of my friends come round to where I work or where I live, right, you can all come into the room but you’ve got to stay outside. So you know that everyone else is in there having a free and open conversation and you’re like stuck outside...So like it’s a complete diss and when you think that this was all his world... he’s like on the ceiling...that’s the first time that she blocks him. He then actively uses other people D [another Internet user] mainly, right so that so if you’re A, I’m X [perpetrator], I’ll send a message to D but it wouldn’t be to D, it’ll be to you. Right? D would go “that’s not for me” and he just copies it straight to you. You say “I don’t want to talk to him” and he sent it back saying “she won’t talk”... Eventually, because they’ve blocked him now he uses the phone, he rings B [victim], X is absolutely gone, A can’t even talk on the phone, B is absolutely livid, he’s on the ceiling.” **Thomas**

The theme of the unhelpful victim continued when participants described the obstacles that victims put in their way when they are trying to deal with cases involving CH. The first issue participants had with respect to victims assisting police officers in their investigation

is that of information. Many participants explained they need as much information about any incidents of CH which they can use to gather further evidence that can be used when prosecuting perpetrators. As Amanda highlighted, police officers need information about the case and victims failing to provide information can impede their case.

“We feed off intelligence, anything that’s given to us we act on it, so the less information we get, the less we can do about it.” **Amanda**

On occasion, victims may withhold information that they have retaliated back against the perpetrator. One explanation is that victims withhold such information because they are concerned that providing that information would reflect badly on them and the police may not pursue their case. However, David explained a victim’s retaliation against the perpetrator provides evidence of the extent to which the victim is upset by the perpetrator’s actions. David further elaborated if the police discover information has been withheld, the discovery would hinder the victim’s case as they have allowed themselves to be labelled a liar.

“Sometimes you’ll get that they haven’t sent anything back but this is not entirely true. We need to see everything in this context; the court needs to see everything in context if it’s taken into court. At the end of the day, if you’ve sent a message back that’s abusive, I’ve got no problems with that I can put in your statement because that shows how it’s been for you over a period of time. But what you’re actually portraying is that you’re actually a liar by not telling us everything.” **David**

Finally, participants explained that some victims do not assist police officers in gathering evidence against the perpetrator. Victims were perceived reluctant to allow the seizure of their computers and/or mobile phones that can be used to access evidence, as can be seen from Jake’s excerpt. Jake’s comment echoes Amanda’s comment that if the victim refuses to provide police with information, or refuse to give permission to the police to interrogate their computer or mobile phone, there is little the police can do to pursue the perpetrator.

“You start off by using the victim’s computer, because the stuff is coming into the victim that you’re looking at. So, it’s them giving you permission to do that.” **Jake**

7.4 Discussion

This study aimed to explore police officers' perceptions of cyber-harassment (CH), victims of CH, and their role in dealing with cases involving CH. Using thematic analysis, three themes emerged in the data – *accessibility*, *threat*, and *the unhelpful victim*. The *accessibility* theme revealed participants' views of the vulnerability of Internet users in falling victim to CH, and the ease of gathering evidence in cases involving CH. *Threat* illustrated participants' perceptions of their role as safety promoters, and participants considered intent, harm, severity and seizure of computers as indicative of the threat posed by perpetrators of CH. The third theme, *the unhelpful victim*, highlighted participants' frustrations with cyber-harassed victims who they perceived to be unwilling to assist them with their investigations of cyber-harassing cases. Participants perceived the unhelpful victim as undermining cyber-harassing cases, and made participants' jobs more difficult.

7.4.1 Perceptions of Cyber-harassment and Victims

Participants perceived increasing accessibility of the Internet, coupled with individuals levels of online self-disclosure as contributing to the vulnerability of individuals in being subjected to CH. Participants emphasised the evolution of technology has reached a stage that the Internet is accessible to anyone, and that perpetrators can access victims 'at the touch of a button'. Researchers have warned the prevalence of CH will increase as people incorporate technology in their lives (e.g., Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Salter & Bryden, 2009), and participants' perceptions lend support to this.

Furthermore, participants perceived younger individuals as more vulnerable to experiencing CH than older individuals which suggested an age-related digital divide. Granello and Wheaton (2004) suggested individuals under 35 years were more likely to use the Internet, and in a nationally representative sample, Dutton and Helsper (2007) found that students were one of the largest groups of Internet users. However, Gilleard and Higgs (2008) suggested the age-related digital divide was influenced by generational rather than stage of life influences. This means that whilst an age-related digital divide exists, this gap is likely to dissipate as younger people in today's society progress through their

lifespan. Thus, it is logical to think that, in years to come, older individuals will be vulnerable to CH to the same degree as young people in today's society.

In conjunction with accessibility to the Internet, participants were simultaneously concerned about individuals' online self-disclosure, and the culture of 'friending' (adding 'friends' to a social networking profile) other people within social networking sites. In a series of studies, Joinson (2001b) found that visual anonymity plays a key role in online self-disclosure. Whilst all computer-mediated communication (CMC) theories attempt to explain visual anonymity, social identification mode of deindividuation effects (SIDE) theory provides the greatest explanation of why individuals self-disclose on social networking sites.

According to SIDE theory, Spears, Lea and Postmes (2007) explain the context of CMC increases the saliency of either social or personal identity. When social identity is salient, individuals are expected to adhere to the group norms, whereas when personal identity is salient, individuals are expected to adhere to their own standards. Anonymity can be visual anonymity (anonymity of others to self) or lack of identifiability (anonymity of self to others) (Joinson, 2001b). Importantly, Spears et al. suggest that lack of identifiability can emphasise social isolation as they perceive themselves as separated from the group. However, visual anonymity produces heightened self-awareness and the salience of physical and affective states are increased which contributes to self-disclosure. Furthermore, Lea, Spears and deGroot (2001) found that visual anonymity increases attraction within the group. Arguably, social networking sites increase the salience of social identity, and SIDE theory predicts that individuals will adhere to group norms. In social networking sites, self-disclosure and 'friending' is encouraged and a norm within the sites (boyd, 2006; Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, & Walther, 2008). By self-disclosing in social networking sites, individuals solidify their place within the group, contribute to a sense of community, and self-disclosure increases their attraction within, and to, the group.

Furthermore, SIDE theory predicts that when visually anonymous, individuals experience heightened self-awareness, are accountable for their behaviour, and become concerned with self-presentation. This may explain the process of accumulating friends within social networking sites that caused concern for participants in this study. In a study examining the

process of ‘friending’ in social networking sites, boyd (2006) found that adding strangers as friends was not uncommon, and it was inappropriate to decline friend requests, and the number of friends on an individual’s profile was an indicator of their popularity. Furthermore, Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell and Walther (2008) found there are an optimal number of friends that led to positive impressions of profile owners. Individuals with too few friends were perceived as lonely and undesirable, and too many friends were indicative of desperation. These two studies highlight that adding friends to social networking sites is the norm, and desired by individuals who use social networking sites.

The application of SIDE theory provides an understanding that the salience of social identity is increased in social networking sites. The increased salience of social identity promotes adherence to the established norms in these sites, which include the encouragement of self-disclosure and the process of ‘friending’. However, individuals may be unaware of the dark side of engaging in such behaviours. By adding people who are not well-known to the profile owner, individuals willingly provide access to a wealth of information about themselves, their offline lives, and their offline friends and family. This indicates that people do not adhere to the safety standards they would normally apply in their offline lives, which was of concern to participants in this study.

One of the most concerning findings of this study was that participants perceived victims of cyber-harassment as unhelpful in assisting their investigations of CH. Participants were concerned that victims are unwilling to follow through with allegations of CH against the perpetrator. For participants, this meant that victims wanted police officers to lodge the complaint but not take any action, and was particularly prevalent in cases that involved domestic abuse.

The link drawn by participants between harassment and domestic abuse supports research suggesting that domestic violence plays a role in offline harassment. Coleman (1997) argued that leaving an abusive partner is ineffective and dangerous as the abused partner may experience harassment or stalking at the hands of the abuser. Burgess, Baker, Greening et al. (1997) recruited perpetrators who had been charged with battery and stalking. They found that stalking is a continuance of domestic violence, which supports Coleman’s argument. Participants’ perception that there is a link between domestic

violence and CH indicates that domestic abusers are embracing new technology to continue their abuse of a partner. Furthermore, as Coleman's research highlighted, victims of domestic abuse may be aware that pursuit of legal action against their abuser may prove dangerous and ineffective. An initial complaint may be made against the perpetrator as a means to cease immediate threats posed. However, victims may not wish to pursue their complaint because they fear further reprisals.

Participants explained cyber-harassed victims were unwilling to change their online behaviour, which they viewed as an important step in minimising any further harassment. Behavioural changes recommended by participants included withdrawal from social networking sites, becoming more anonymous online, or blocking the perpetrator. Bocij (2004) argued that avoiding online spaces contravenes individuals' human rights. However, self-protection strategies are used in everyday life, and Internet users need to protect themselves whilst online (Basu & Jones, 2007; Salter & Bryden, 2009).

Participants explained victims' unwillingness to protect themselves could be used as evidence against them if their case was brought to court. Defence for the perpetrator would be able to argue the experience did not impact on the victim to the extent argued by the victim. Furthermore, participants noted that victims minimise their behaviour (reactions and retaliation) towards the perpetrator. Without full disclosure, victims would be perceived as liars, thereby reducing their credibility. The unwillingness to change behaviour and withholding contextual information about cyber-harassing incidents undermines police officers' investigations of the crime.

The failure to disclose information to police officers contrasted with victims' willingness to self-disclose via CMC. Whilst SIDE theory was used to explain why individuals self-disclose in social networking sites, media richness theory explains why the same individuals are likely to lie in face-to-face (FtF) settings. Media richness theory stipulates that individuals prefer different forms of media to relay messages, dependent upon reducing equivocality and uncertainty (Daft & Lengel, 1986). In FtF communications, individuals have access to immediate feedback, body language, tone of voice, message content, and a variety of language. Arguably, Rice (1992) suggests media richness is

reduced in CMC. As lying is equivocal (Whitty & Joinson, 2009), individuals are more likely to lie in rich media, such as FtF.

However, there are many reasons for lying to police officers when reporting CH. Participants noted that victims want to gain the support of police officers, and in this context, lying may be more indicative of impression management strategies. Despite reports of victims lying or withholding information about cyber-harassing incidents, participants explained they need to know everything about any incidents that have occurred. It is understandable that victims engage in impression management strategies, and thus, may not report their own behaviour (such as retaliation) because they fear that police officers will not take their complaint seriously. However, participants in this study explained that the victim's behaviour can further illustrate the impact the perpetrator's behaviour has on them, rather than damaging their case.

Participants were divided in the perceived usefulness of blocking perpetrators from contacting victims of CH. Most police officers suggested blocking as a primary strategy to deter the cyber-harasser, and this advice is re-iterated in publications available to the general public (e.g., O'Connell, Price & Barrow, 2004). However, the case described by one participant illustrated that blocking can be ineffective and may escalate the perpetrator's pursuit behaviour. There may be a threshold during a cyber-harassing campaign before which blocking is effective in deterring the cyber-harasser. Once the threshold is passed, the perpetrator's motives may be strengthened and blocking them may not deter them. However, this is purely speculative and more research is needed to determine what the threshold might be, and whether differing motivations have the same effect on the usefulness of blocking strategies.

7.4.2 Police Officers' Role in Combating Cyber-Harassment

Participants all agreed that dealing with cases involving cyber-harassment formed part of their role as a police officer. Kamphuis, Emmelkamp and deVries (2004) reported that English police officers believed it was their job to deal with cases involving offline harassment. The findings of this study lends further support to these findings and illustrate

that CH is perceived by police officers as part of their job remit, despite the virtual nature of CH. Specifically, police officers perceived their role solely as evidence-gatherers.

In relation to CH, participants perceived evidence-gathering to be accessible by contacting ISPs, website owners, or by seizing the victim and/or perpetrator's computers. Furthermore, because of the accessibility of evidence, participants believed it is possible to trace perpetrators despite attempts to remain anonymous. This finding contradicts the assumption of Bocij (2004) and Griffiths, Rogers and Sparrow (1998). One explanation is the evolution of technology and investigative techniques have developed since the authors' time of writing. The accessibility of evidence is a positive finding that may encourage cyber-harassed victims to report CH to the police.

The accessibility of evidence led participants' suggestions that victims do not need to keep harassing messages. However, this contradicts Brown's (2000) recommendations for investigating CH. Two of the recommendations include not deleting messages received, and acting quickly to contact ISPs, as they retain information for a short period of time. However, when initially making a complaint, it is unlikely that police officers would pursue obtainment of evidence from ISPs without being able to see some evidence of the perpetrator's behaviour. Furthermore, the resources (such as time and financial) required to obtain such evidence decrease the likelihood of following these lines of investigation.

Whilst the *Protection from Harassment Act* (1997) does not require proof of the perpetrator's intent to cause harm to the victim, participants regarded establishing intent as a pertinent aspect of their role in investigating cases. One method described by participants to establish intent is to issue the perpetrator with a harassment warning. In conjunction with establishing intent, a harassment warning contributes to ensuring the reasonable person's test is met. In relation to issuing harassment warnings, Brown (2000) states that harassment warnings 'might be appropriate; however this is not obligatory' (p. 3). This recommendation is ambiguous as he does not explain whether harassment notices are not required for the most or least severe cases. Despite Brown's recommendation, participants in this study considered issuing harassment warnings as the first step in dealing with a case involving CH.

Whilst participants reported positive perceptions in how they can deal with CH, the severity of the case determined what they could actually do. For the most serious cases, police officers can issue harassment warnings, seize computers, and contacting website owners and/or ISPs to retrieve evidence. However, participants perceived serious cases as involving threats to the victim's life. According to Salter and Bryden (2009), the UK courts are limiting the coverage of the *PfHA*, and a precedent has been set to ensure that only the most severe cases of harassment proceed to court. As police officers are responsible for enforcing the law, participants' perceptions of severity reflect the precedent set in court.

In this study, the severity of potential harm to the victim was associated with the credibility of threats made to victims. The credibility of threats made via CMC have been questioned, especially in cases whereby the perpetrator lives outside the UK (Burgess & Baker, 2002). The findings of this study illustrated if perpetrators live outside the UK, it is unlikely that police officers will take the victim's complaint as seriously as when the perpetrator lives in the same country. Despite the questionability of the credibility of threats made from an online harasser, a case illustrated by one participant demonstrated that perpetrators can travel from other countries to carry out threats made. However, Sheridan and Grant (2007) found cyberstalked victims are threatened to the same degree as victims of offline harassment. Thus, the view that such threats are minimised reinforces concerns made by other researchers (e.g., Bocij & McFarlane, 2003), and suggests that cyber-harassed victims may not be given the full protection from the law and law enforcers.

Interestingly, participants noted that threats made to victims are likely to be dealt with using other pieces of legislation rather than the *PfHA*. Specifically, serious threats made to victims are treated as more serious offences that may fall under the remit of section 4 of the *PfHA*. Arguably, the practice of dealing with threats made to victims using other pieces of legislation renders section 4 of the Act as redundant.

7.4.3 Limitations

The findings of this study cannot be generalised due to the sampling strategy utilised. The sampling strategy included convenience sampling using the snowball technique, all participants were self-selecting volunteers, and all participants worked in the

Nottinghamshire Police force. The sampling strategy may have introduced bias as only individuals who believed they were knowledgeable in dealing with cyber-crime may have volunteered to participate. Furthermore, there are many different police forces within the UK, and different forces may have different procedures in dealing with crime. Thus, the findings of this study cannot be generalised beyond participants who actually participated in this study. A quantitative survey would be useful to expand and generalise the findings of this research.

Participants focused on the threat posed by cyber-harassers to victims and the severity of cases. Whilst participants provided an example of a threat that was serious (e.g., threat to life), the notion of threat and severity is ambiguous. The study failed to ascertain the full spectrum threats posed to cyber-harassed victims that police officers regard as serious. Furthermore, the study did not investigate police officers' perceptions of cases involving CH whereby perpetrators implicitly threaten victims, or do not threaten victims. Consequently, the findings of this study may be most beneficial to victims who have experienced severe instances of CH, and who have been explicitly threatened by perpetrators.

As semi-structured interviews were conducted, participants were identifiable by the researcher and any of their colleagues who were recruited using snowball sampling. Furthermore, the salience of participants' profession would have been increased in this study. Therefore, participants may have been reluctant to portray negative perceptions about their ability in dealing with CH, especially if participants were motivated to portray a positive image of the police force. If this occurred, the ecological validity of the research may have been compromised.

7.4.4 Future Research

Whilst ambiguity surrounded the perceived severity of cyber-harassing behaviours, future research is required to explore this issue. A vignette study which manipulates the type of threat and the credibility of threats made to cyber-harassed victims would be beneficial. In manipulating these variables, questions to participants could establish whether participants perceive police intervention as necessary. Questions posed to participants could include

whether officers should approach the perpetrator, issue harassment warnings, seize the victim or perpetrator's computer, and contact ISPs and/or website owners. Such a survey could be distributed to both Internet users and the police in an attempt to establish differences in perceptions, and would be useful in assessing gaps in participants' expectations.

The findings of this study illustrated the 'unhelpful victim', who is unwilling to change their online behaviour, or withdraw or change their social networking profile. Further research would benefit from recruiting social networking users and examining individuals' attachments to their social networking profiles, and to ascertain information they disclose and do not disclose and who they feel comfortable disclosing information to. By increasing understanding of these issues, researchers would be better equipped to offer suggestions to users of social networking sites regarding their safety.

As an attempt to triangulate the findings from this study, research would benefit from recruiting cyber-harassed victims who have contacted the police about cyber-harassment. Such research could focus on the remedies offered by police officers when dealing with their case, and victims' perceptions of the usefulness of the remedies offered.

7.4.5 Implications

This research has several implications for social policy and for cyber-harassed victims. First, police intervention is dependent on the severity of the perpetrator's behaviour and threats made to cyber-harassed victims. However, Hills and Taplin (1998) noted that stalking often involves behaviours that appear benign unless they are taken in the context of a campaign against the victim. Furthermore, threats made may not be explicit, and may not be perceived as credible by police officers. In conjunction with the precedent set in the UK courts that ensures only the most serious of harassment cases proceed to court, police may not be able to offer support to the majority of victims of CH.

If police officers cannot protect the majority of cyber-harassed victims, Internet users need to protect themselves more whilst online to reduce their vulnerability. This need for self-protection is more pronounced with the increase in social networking sites, and the culture

of ‘friending’. ‘Friending’ strangers and individuals that Internet users do not know well can be a positive experience as it offers a unique way for individuals to increase their social circles. However, users who add strangers to their profiles need to be more aware of the dark side of allowing strangers access to information about their lives and other friends/family.

The owners of social networking sites need to shoulder greater responsibility for users’ knowledge of how to use their site, and in particular, privacy settings. For example, *Facebook* is a popular social networking site used in the UK. The highest privacy setting allows users to customise their privacy settings by choosing which ‘friends’ can access information on their profile. Although speculative, many users may be unaware of this feature. *Facebook* owners could send all users an email which highlights this feature, and explaining why and how this can be used. Alternatively, online tutorials could be made readily available to users.

Furthermore, the owners of social networking sites could take greater measures of control that can be used to assist police officers in investigating cyber-crime. For example, website owners could request details from potential (and current) users that can be used to confirm their identity before allowing access to the site. This would make it easier for police officers to trace perpetrators of any cyber-crime if perpetrators use social networking sites to commit crime. The owners of social networking sites could make it easier for police officers to contact them by issuing a contact email address or telephone number that is only available to police officers.

The *PfHA* was deliberately intended to be vague and appears sufficiently broad to incorporate all forms of harassment. Furthermore, the Act does not require the burden of proof of the perpetrator’s intent. However, application of the Act appears more complicated and precedents restrict the usefulness of the Act in prosecuting cyber-harassment. Whilst section 4 allows for more serious forms of harassment to be prosecuted, police officers use other pieces of legislation to deal with more serious threats made to victims. This highlights the need for more detailed guidelines to be issued regarding the application of the Act to real examples of both offline and online harassment. This would provide both police officers and victims with clear ideas of what and when the

Act provides coverage. Furthermore, if the Act is less useful in cases involving CH, particularly when the perpetrator lives outside the UK, new legislation would be required that offers Internet users protection. However, the call for new and more specific legislation has been requested by other authors (see Salter & Bryden, 2009).

Finally, police procedures in dealing with CH need to be more transparent to the general public. Participants in this study perceived cyber-harassed victims as unhelpful when police officers request the victim's computer and/or mobile phone to preserve and gather evidence, or to change their online behaviour. Additionally, previous research suggests that victims are dissatisfied with action taken by police officers (e.g., Finn, 2004). This dissatisfaction may be confounded with the time taken to fully investigate instances of CH. Police officers should clearly inform victims of what will be required from them, why, and investigative timescales upon first contact. This information may increase victims' satisfaction with how their case is dealt with, encourage victims' co-operation, and ultimately encourage victims to report CH to the police.

Chapter 8: General Discussion

This chapter provides a discussion of the findings of this research in relation to the research questions and aims of the thesis. Particular focus is given to inconsistencies and similarities in findings of the four studies used to investigate cyber-harassment. The chapter begins with a discussion of findings relating to the perceived criminality of cyber-harassment, and covers issues such as the tendency to blame victims for their experiences. The chapter proceeds with a discussion of victims' experiences of cyber-harassment. This section includes discussion of the cyber-harassing behaviours individuals' experience, the prior victim-perpetrator relationship, and relationships in the context of causing cyber-harassment and in being affected by cyber-harassment, the impact of cyber-harassment, and the issue of threats made by perpetrators. The third section deals with cyber-harassed victims and support, and focuses on support sought by victims, and factors influencing support from victims' peers. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of this research, and an overview of future research identified during the course of this thesis.

8.1 Perceived Criminality of Cyber-Harassment

This thesis aimed to determine whether undergraduate students perceived cyber-harassing behaviours as criminal. Perceptions of criminality were explored during the quantitative and qualitative studies that recruited undergraduate participants. The survey required participants to indicate whether they perceived 18 online behaviours (associated with cyber-harassment) as criminal. Factor analysis was conducted as a means of data reduction, indicating three factors underlying perceived criminality – *malicious software*, *harassing messages*, and *deception/disclosure*. Participants perceived *malicious software* as criminal, followed by *harassing messages* but were unsure about *deception/disclosure*. Conversely, Studies 2 and 3 revealed an online/offline dichotomy where cyber-harassment was perceived as 'not real' because of the virtual nature of harassment. In contrast, harassment was associated with offline behaviours (such as telephone calls and following the victim). Furthermore, participants in Study 3 blamed cyber-harassed victims for their plight because of their online behaviour, whereas perpetrators were perceived as 'lonely' and 'sad' people who do not intend to cause distress to their victim. The findings of Study 1

contradict the findings from Studies 2 and 3, and appeared to highlight an inconsistency in this research.

Methodological differences across studies may contribute to the inconsistency in perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours amongst undergraduate students. Several authors have noted that explicitly asking participants about harassment or stalking may trigger bias in participants' perceptions. Spitzberg and Cadaz (2002) discussed stalking stereotypes created and reinforced by media portrayals of harassment. Furthermore, Meloy (1998) argued against labelling perpetrators of harassment as 'stalkers', favouring the term 'obsessional followers', to avoid stereotypical connotations associated with the stalking label. In this research, participants in Study 1 were asked to report whether they perceived 18 online behaviours as criminal. However, participants in Studies 2 and 3 were aware that they were going to be interviewed about their experiences (where applicable) and perceptions of cyber-harassment. Therefore, by using the term 'cyber-harassment' Studies 2 and 3 may have been susceptible to priming effects.

However, when the items that loaded on the factors found in Study 1 are examined, consistencies across studies begin to emerge. Items that loaded on the *malicious software* and *harassing messages* factors included behaviours that were threatening to the recipient, and could be prosecuted as single offences under the *Computer Misuse Act (1990)* and the *Malicious Communications Act (1998)*. However, items that loaded on the *deception/disclosure* factor included behaviours that were ambiguous but indicative of cyber-harassment. Whilst participants in Study 1 perceived *malicious software* and *harassing messages* as criminal, they were unsure about *deception/disclosure*. However, these findings must be treated with caution as malicious software was not perceived as cyber-harassment by participants in Study 3.

In Study 2, seven undergraduate students who had experienced cyber-harassing behaviours explained the perpetrator's behaviour was not criminal. Furthermore, two participants perceived cyber-harassment as criminal if the victim was a minor, whereas three perceived the perpetrator's behaviour as criminal. In Study 3, four participants perceived cyber-harassment as criminal and two participants perceived it as criminal if the victim was a minor. However, nine participants did not perceive cyber-harassment as criminal, four of

which perceived cyber-harassment as criminal *if* it escalated to offline harassment, whilst two participants were unsure. The confusion among participants when considering the criminality of cyber-harassment suggests that priming effects did not affect the research to a significant degree. Furthermore, across studies, this research illustrates the virtual nature of cyber-harassment is problematic for judgements of criminality.

Rather than perceiving the perpetrator's behaviour as criminal, Study 3 illustrated that cyber-harassed victims' online behaviour is blamed for their experiences, lending support to Lerner and Miller's (1978) 'just world' hypothesis. According to the hypothesis, individuals need to believe the world is just to allow them to perceive their environment as controllable and stable. When judging whether an individual's fate is just, bystanders can either compensate the victim, or believe the individual got what they deserved. Sheridan, Gillett, Davies, Blaauw and Patel (2003) and Scott, Lloyd and Gavin (2010) found support for the 'just world' hypothesis, as both studies reported that victims were more likely to be blamed for offline harassment if they had a previous relationship with the perpetrator than if the perpetrator was an acquaintance or stranger. Sheridan et al. explained that if the victim has a relationship with the victim, there is more opportunity to cause offence that may contribute to the onset of harassment compared to acquaintances or strangers. In Study 3, participants attributed blame to victims because they believed victims place too much personal information on the Internet that invites cyber-harassment. Conversely, perpetrators were perceived as 'sad' or 'lonely', simply seeking interpersonal contact, and do not intend to cause distress to the victim. However, contrasting Sheridan et al.'s findings, participants in Study 3 believed strangers were likely to harass people via the Internet. Just world beliefs are perceived as adaptive as they allow individuals to believe their environment is safe and stable. In the context of cyberspace, communicating with strangers may be perceived as an Internet norm. By blaming the victim's online behaviour for being cyber-harassed by strangers, individuals feel they are protected against being cyber-harassed if they do not place a lot of personal information on the Internet.

In addition to determining whether cyber-harassment is perceived as criminal, this thesis set out to determine whether gender and/or personality influenced judgements of criminality. Results indicated that females were more likely than males to perceive harassing messages and behaviours associated with deception/disclosure as criminal. This

lends further support to previous research that suggests females are more sensitive to harassment than males (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Hills & Taplin, 1998; Phillips, Quirk, Rosenfield & O'Connor, 2004).

The links between personality and perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours was less clear. High-agreeable individuals were less likely to perceive harassing messages as criminal, and individuals who scored high on Internet self-efficacy were more likely to perceive malicious software as criminal. However, the effect sizes for these findings were small, explaining 4.3% and 4.1% (respectively) of the variance. Furthermore, these findings were not consistent across other types of cyber-harassing behaviours. Therefore, it must be concluded that personality did not consistently predict individuals' judgements about the criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours.

In relation to individuals' perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours, this thesis suggests that cyber-harassment is unlikely to be judged as criminal. Rather than perceiving the perpetrator's behaviour as criminal, victims are more likely to be blamed as their online behaviour is perceived as inviting cyber-harassment. Gender significantly predicted individuals' judgements about the criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours. Personality predicted judgements about the criminality of some cyber-harassing behaviours. However, the effect sizes of significant findings were small, and the findings were not consistent. This indicated that other variables (such as just world beliefs) may better predict judgements of criminality.

8.2 The Experience of Cyber-Harassment

This thesis aimed to explore the experience of cyber-harassment and evaluate the impact on victims. Victims' experiences are likely to consist of the nature and extent of the cyber-harassment itself, the attitudes of their peers, and the attitudes of police officers should they report their experience. Study 1 used quantitative measures to identify the types of cyber-harassing behaviours that victims experience, whilst Study 2 used qualitative methods to provide a more in-depth understanding of the nature, extent and impact of cyber-harassment on victims. Qualitative interviews were also used in studies 3 and 4 to

gain an insight into the attitudes held by victims' peers and police officers (respectively). Thus, each study contributed to addressing this aim.

Study 1 illustrated that experiencing behaviours associated with cyber-harassment was common, with nearly half of participants reporting they had received malicious software that could be used to damage their hardware and/or software. Other frequently reported behaviours included receiving sexually explicit and/or obscene messages via the Internet, and someone changing their online identity to contact participants when their previous contact attempts had been 'blocked'. Such behaviours have been associated with cyber-harassment in previous literature. For instance, Bocij (2003) reported that 40.5% of participants received malicious software, and Bocij, Bocij, and McFarlane (2003) described Mr X, who used different online identities to contact his victims when they blocked previous contact attempts, and who also sent victims malicious software embedded in emails to access information held on their computer. Despite the temporal difference between the studies mentioned and this thesis, this research supports previous research and illustrated that perpetrators of cyber-harassment use similar methods to contact their victims.

Study 1 explored the relationships between personality, Internet self-efficacy, gender and the likelihood of experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours. Whilst some relationships between the variables arose, the study illustrated that gender, personality, and Internet self-efficacy did not consistently predict the likelihood of experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours. This indicates that individuals are targeted by perpetrators of cyber-harassment regardless of victims' personality, gender, or Internet self-efficacy.

Whilst Study 1 illustrated that individuals experience behaviours associated with cyber-harassment, the study did not ascertain whether individuals who experienced the behaviours perceived them as harassing. Furthermore, harassment has been referred to as a 'constellation of behaviours' (Mullen, Pathé, Purcell & Stuart, 1999, p. 1244), and Study 1 failed to illustrate the complexity of cyber-harassing experiences as individual behaviours were investigated. Finally, the behaviours listed (e.g., receiving malicious software that could be used to damage hardware and/or software) are vague as they do not explain what those behaviours mean to participants. For instance, using the example of malicious

software, it was not possible to determine whether participants accidentally downloaded the software, or whether it was sent to them as part of a campaign of cyber-harassment.

Individuals who reported experiencing cyber-harassing behaviours in Study 1 were recruited to participate in online interviews for Study 2. This was advantageous as alternative methods of recruitment may have been to recruit self-defined victims of cyber-harassment. However, locating participants may have proved difficult, and victims may not be aware that they have been cyber-harassed. If individuals are not aware that they have been cyber-harassed, the study would have failed to provide insights to the experiences of such individuals. Furthermore, individuals who self-define as victims of harassment are likely to have experienced extreme forms of harassment, and research indicates that when individuals are allowed to self-define as victims of harassment, prevalence rates rise dramatically (see Tjaden, Thoennes & Allison, 2000). Prior knowledge of the behaviours experienced by participants reduced the need for lengthier interviews which may have been detrimental to online interviews. Furthermore, prior knowledge of participants' experiences enabled the researcher to explore experiences relating to a wide range of behaviours experienced by participants, to filter participants who reported high ratings of upset following their experiences, and those who indicated the same perpetrator had engaged in two or more of the behaviours experienced by participants. Thus, the resulting sample was expected to have experienced cyber-harassment as defined by the *PfHA*.

Across the qualitative studies, victims and police officers held the opinion that cyber-harassment was perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Ten out of twelve participants who took part in Study 2 knew the person who engaged in cyber-harassing behaviours against them. Of the two participants who did not know the harasser, one involved a company associated with the sex industry, who sent unsolicited messages to the recipient in an attempt to sell their services. The remaining participant who reported the perpetrator was unknown, indicated suspicion that the perpetrator may have been a peer but was reluctant to attribute blame as there was no way to prove who the perpetrator was. In Study 4, police officers considered that instances of cyber-harassment are an extension of school bullying or are related to domestic violence. One police officer described what he perceived to be a unique case which involved cyber-harassment perpetrated by a stranger.

Contrasting the views of victims and police officers, the majority of participants in Study 3 considered that cyber-harassment was likely to be perpetrated by someone unknown to the victim. Spitzberg and Cadaz (2002) illustrated that stereotypical views of offline harassment include the perception that harassment occurs between strangers, and this view is created and reinforced by media portrayals of stalking. The discrepancy between perceptions of the prior perpetrator-victim relationship for online and offline harassment may reflect greater public awareness of offline harassment. Furthermore, Whitty and Carr (2006) suggest that individuals split online behaviour from offline consequences. The findings of this research suggest that compartmentalisation of online and offline behaviour goes beyond perceived consequences of online behaviour, and suggests that individuals compartmentalise their beliefs and attitudes towards the online and offline worlds.

The finding that the majority of perpetrators of cyber-harassment are known to their victims contradicts Bocij's (2003) suggestion that perpetrators are likely to cyber-harass someone they did not previously know. Bocij reported that 42% of cyber-harassed victims did not know the perpetrator. He considered that whilst some of these victims may not have been able to identify the perpetrator, this explanation could not account for all of the cases. Bocij concluded that strangers engaging in cyber-harassing behaviours was more common compared to offline harassment. To further quantify his position, Bocij refers to Mr X (described by Bocij, Bocij & McFarlane, 2003) who targeted victims he located solely online, had never met, and selected his targets on the basis of a few demographic characteristics listed on the Internet. However, more recent evidence suggests that victims are likely to know the perpetrator (e.g., Sheridan & Grant, 2007), and this research lends further support to these findings.

One explanation is that Bocij's (2003) findings are now outdated considering the fast pace of the evolution of the Internet. More individuals are using the Internet each year within Britain (Dutton & Helsper, 2007), and prior use of the Internet is associated with greater Internet self-efficacy (Eastin & LaRose, 2000). Therefore, individuals may be equipped with greater knowledge and more sophisticated software that help with the identification of other users who use the Internet. As such, victims of cyber-harassment may be more able to identify perpetrators of cyber-harassment than victims recruited by Bocij. Furthermore, Bocij may have prematurely concluded that cyber-harassed victims are likely to be targeted

by strangers. The caveat raised in this research indicates that quantitative surveys that aim to determine the prior perpetrator-victim relationship should distinguish between ‘unknown’ and ‘stranger’ categories.

Table 26 provides an overview of the themes identified in the three qualitative studies of this thesis. The themes reflected participants’ perceptions of cyber-harassment, the impact of cyber-harassment and perceptions of victims.

Table 26: Themes identified in the qualitative research of this thesis

	Victims’ accounts of cyber-harassment	Non-victims’ perceptions of cyber-harassment	Police officers’ perceptions of cyber-harassment
1	It’s all virtual, nothing is face to face confrontational <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The fantasy realm - The mentally ill perpetrator: “psychos and nutjobs” - “It was something silly” - Embodiment of threat - “I’m not sure” 	Anonymity	Accessibility
2	PTSD-Like Symptoms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Re-experiencing the event - Avoidance and Emotional Numbing 	Social Support	Threat
3		Victim Blame	The Unhelpful Victim

Victims of cyber-harassment and police officers believed that cyber-harassment was likely to be caused by the initiation and dissolution of relationships. For victims, cyber-harassment was the consequence of the dissolution of romantic relationships or friendships. Some victims reported a link between new romantic relationships and subsequent cyber-harassment as the initiation of new romantic relationships caused ex-partners to be jealous of their new relationship and subsequently, participants suffered cyber-harassment. This latter category has been neglected in previous research investigating offline and online harassment, which has focused on the link between the dissolution of romantic relationships and the onset of harassment (e.g., Davis, Ace & Andra, 2002), and warrants further investigation.

Whilst victims believed that cyber-harassment was related to their relationships, non-victims believed that cyber-harassment is caused anonymously. For non-victims, visual

anonymity reduces perpetrators' vulnerability and accountability which increases feelings of power and encourages them to engage in cyber-harassing behaviours. In this sense, the Internet was perceived as allowing for identity play during which perpetrators might behave in ways they may not normally behave in the offline world. This view was shared by victims of cyber-harassment, who viewed the internet as a 'fantasy realm' that allowed for identity creation and identity play. However, victims differed from non-victims as they perceived cyber-harassment as being a personal attack rather than a by-product of computer-mediated communication.

Despite victims' perceptions that the Internet is a 'fantasy realm', some victims felt threatened by the perpetrator. Interestingly, none of the cyber-harassed victims who perceived the perpetrator's behaviour as threatening were explicitly threatened. Despite the lack of explicit threats, cyber-harassed victims perceived the threat of physical violence as credible. As these victims feared that violence would be used against them, they meet the requirements of section four of the *PfHA*. Previous research indicates that perpetrators of cyber-harassment are more likely to issue threats to victims compared to offline harassment (e.g., Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005), or at least to the same extent as perpetrators of offline harassment (e.g., Sheridan & Grant, 2007). This research illustrated that individuals who were threatened reported the perpetrator's threatening behaviour did not cause them to fear violence would be used against them, whilst those who were not explicitly threatened reported they were fearful of being physically attacked. Whilst these findings are interesting, it is unclear why this finding occurred.

The notion of threat was also perceived as important by police officers who were interviewed in this research. Police officers perceived serious cases of cyber-harassment as involving credible threats made to the victim's life. Police officers explained that when serious threats are made to cyber-harassed victims, they can trace the perpetrator and all evidence relating to the case, and arrest the perpetrator. However, this research indicates that victims may not be explicitly threatened by perpetrators yet they still fear violence will be used against them. The lack of explicit threats from perpetrators will be problematic if victims approach the police for help. This potential problem has been noted in cases relating to offline harassment (e.g., Draucker, 1999), and highlights the need to further

clarify the terms under which the *Protection from Harassment Act* (1997) offers protection to victims.

Despite the threat perceived by cyber-harassed victims and consideration from police officers that threats made by perpetrators may be credible, non-victims (Study 3) believed the level of danger to the victim is diminished in cases of cyber-harassment. Non-victims explained that perpetrators were unlikely to be able to locate their victim offline, and the computer acts as a barrier which meant the level of threat was diminished. This finding may be attributed to the stereotypical view that victims are unlikely to know the perpetrator prior to the onset of cyber-harassment. Whilst this research suggests strangers engaging in cyber-harassing behaviours are uncommon, there is some evidence that if victims are targeted by strangers, they can locate their victims and the threat they pose can be credible. For instance, Bocij and McFarlane (2002) described the case of the Boehle family who were contacted by strangers attempting to solicit sex from their nine year old daughter, after their contact details were posted on the Internet by their neighbour. Furthermore, the finding that non-victims perceive the threat posed by perpetrators of cyber-harassment as less concerning compared to offline harassment indicates that non-victims trivialise the impact of cyber-harassment on victims.

An interesting finding of this thesis is that whilst cyber-harassed victims had difficulty in establishing whether their experiences were 'real', some reported their experiences had impacted on them greatly. When individuals maintained a distinction between online and offline experiences as being 'not real' and 'real' (respectively), the division of reality shielded some individuals from the impact of cyber-harassment. Despite confusion about whether their experiences of cyber-harassment were real, some participants reported a range of PTSD-like symptoms. It is stressed that this thesis does not claim that these cyber-harassed victims had PTSD. Rather, the symptomology of PTSD provided a coherent framework to report on victims' experiences. Contrasting with victims' reports of the impact of cyber-harassment, the majority of non-victims believed that cyber-harassment can only impact on individuals if the perpetrator is anonymous. This highlights a discrepancy between victims' reports of cyber-harassment and non-victims' expectations about the impact of cyber-harassment.

Finally, non-victims and police officers held negative views about cyber-harassed victims which may contribute to victims' experience of cyber-harassment. Non-victims believed that victims are responsible for inviting cyber-harassment because they may place too much personal information on the Internet. Similarly, police officers explained that the information people place on the Internet makes them more accessible to perpetrators, and may increase the risk of cyber-harassment moving offline. In contrast, non-victims perceived perpetrators as lonely, sad individuals who may suffer from mental illness, who do not intend to cause their victims fear, and are simply trying to make contact with other individuals. In conjunction with perceiving the victim's online behaviour as being a catalyst for online harassment, non-victims and police officers criticised victims' responses to cyber-harassment. Non-victims suggested that victims should avoid cyber-harassment by blocking the perpetrator's contact attempts or to retaliate. Similarly, police officers believed victims were unhelpful as they refused to change their online behaviour following cyber-harassment by avoiding social networking sites or criticised victims for retaliating against the perpetrator.

Valor-Segura, Exposito and Moya (2011) explain that victim blame is characterised by attributing responsibility to the victim, minimising the severity of threats, or by mitigating the perpetrator's actions. These characteristics of victim blame are evidenced in the interviews conducted with non-victims and police officers as part of this thesis. It is argued that 'just world' beliefs may account for victim-blaming tendencies (Lerner & Miller, 1978). According to the 'just world' hypothesis, individuals need to believe that their world is safe and controllable, and people get what they deserve. By attributing blame to victims for their cyber-harassing experiences, individuals can maintain the belief that they will not suffer cyber-harassment if they do not take online risks that they think victims have taken. However, this finding is concerning as it suggests that victims may suffer secondary victimisation by their peers which will contribute to the impact of cyber-harassment on them (Keeney, 2002).

8.3 Cyber-Harassed Victims and Support

The support available to cyber-harassed victims will contribute to the impact of their experiences. As part of the quantitative survey (Study 1), participants were asked to report

who they imagined they would tell if they experienced cyber-harassing behaviours. Significant gender differences emerged, suggesting that (with a few exceptions) females were more likely than males to report cyber-harassing experiences to their family and/or friends. In contrast, males were more likely to report they would not tell anyone about cyber-harassing experiences. Previous research investigating cyber-harassment has often limited support seeking behaviours to the police and Internet service providers (e.g., Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005; Bocij, 2003). Therefore, this research adds to the current literature by expanding the support that victims may seek should they experience cyber-harassment. Furthermore, this research supports previous research in relation to offline harassment, which suggests males are less likely than females to seek support following harassing experiences. However, these findings related to how people imagined they would react to cyber-harassing experiences, and do not reflect how individuals actually behave when faced with cyber-harassment.

When faced with cyber-harassing experiences, this research suggests that victims do not report their experiences to the police, and may not tell their friends or family about their experiences. In this research, none of the individuals who experienced cyber-harassing behaviours reported their experiences to the police. It is likely that this finding was due to participants' confusion about the criminality of cyber-harassment because they did not consider their online experiences as 'real'. Some participants chose to tell their friends about their experiences, resulting for some in good support in dealing with those experiences. However, not all victims reported positive experiences from seeking social support to help them cope with cyber-harassment. In particular, one participant explained that telling friends resulted in unsympathetic responses, which was unhelpful and embarrassing. Another participant reported feeling isolated following cyber-harassing experiences, and feelings of suspicion contributed to feeling that no-one would listen or help with her experiences.

In conjunction with not knowing who to turn to for help, non-victims in this research indicated they may not be able to offer support if a friend approached them about cyber-harassing experiences. The findings of Study 3 indicated that several factors would be considered by non-victims before support would be offered to someone who has experienced cyber-harassment. Factors influencing social support included the level and

depth of friendship individuals would have with a friend experiencing cyber-harassment, knowledge about the victims' personality, and proof of their cyber-harassing experience. Requiring proof before offering help is concerning as victims may not be able to provide proof. Participants in Study 2 noted that cyber-harassment occurs 'behind closed doors', and considered that one of the appeals of using the Internet to harass someone is the secrecy afforded in online communication. For instance, if a perpetrator uses a chat room to send threatening messages to their victim, the victim may not be able to save the communication. Consequently, providing proof of cyber-harassing experiences may not be feasible.

8.4 Implications

This research has serious implications for the type and quality of help available to cyber-harassed victims in coping with their experiences. Despite the perception held by cyber-harassed victims that their experiences are 'not real' because they occur in a virtual world, cyber-harassment has a negative impact on victims. Arguably, peer support may be one of the most helpful forms of support available to cyber-harassed victims. However, victims may not be offered social support from their peers if their peers blame them for their cyber-harassing experiences. The tendency to blame cyber-harassed victims for their experiences is an example of secondary victimisation (Kenney, 2002), which may cause further harm to victims.

Furthermore, the tendency to blame cyber-harassed victims for their experiences will have a significant impact on the prosecution of perpetrators. For instance, barristers and solicitors for the defence may emphasise the victim's responsibility for cyber-harassing instances whilst simultaneously encouraging jurors to sympathise with the perpetrator. Consequently, jurors may find cyber-harassing perpetrators as 'not guilty'.

In conjunction with victim-blaming tendencies, individuals hold stereotypical views of cyber-harassment. For instance, this research suggests that cyber-harassment is perceived to occur between strangers. However, if a case is brought before court that does not conform to stereotypical views of cyber-harassment, jurors may be more likely to find the defendant 'not guilty' of harassment. If jurors are likely to find the defendant 'not guilty',

the prevalence of cyber-harassment will increase, and despite the impact cyber-harassment can have, victims will have little remedy for their experiences.

This research reinforces the need to better educate individuals about cyber-harassment. Education about cyber-harassment should focus on the diversity of forms of cyber-harassment, the various methods used by perpetrators, explaining the notion of cyber-harassment-by-proxy, intent requirements in relation to the *Protection from Harassment Act* (1997), and the credibility of threats made by perpetrators of cyber-harassment. In this research, victims of cyber-harassment and police officers expressed concerns that the ease of cyber-harassment has been increased with the introduction of social networking sites. Therefore, educational tools aimed at increasing individuals' awareness and knowledge of cyber-harassment should be made available to users of social networking sites. However, educational tools should not be limited to social networking sites but should be made available in all online spaces that can be used by perpetrators of cyber-harassment (such as providing links on discussion boards, newsgroups, and online forums).

If perpetrators of cyber-harassment do not explicitly threaten victims, police officers within the UK may not be able to intervene to protect victims. This problem is confounded with precedents set in court which require serious threats to be made before the *Protection from Harassment Act* (1997) can be invoked (Salter & Bryden, 2009). Consequently, other measures need to be taken to protect victims from cyber-harassment. As the Act may not be effective in prosecuting perpetrators of cyber-harassment, new legislation (such as that proposed by Salter & Bryden, 2009) should be introduced to protect Internet users from abuse and victimisation. In the absence of adequate legal protection from cyber-harassment, Internet users need to better protect themselves from unwanted contact and online abuse. Furthermore, website owners need to take more responsibility for abuse that occurs on their websites. For instance, website owners should provide clear instructions about how website users can deal with instances of cyber-harassment. Furthermore, if Internet users report cyber-harassment to website owners, there should be greater collaboration between website owners and the police, making it easier for the police to gain access to information about incidents of cyber-harassment.

The application of the *Protection from Harassment Act* (1997) is more complicated than a simple reading of the Act portrays. For example, whilst the Act does not stipulate the need to issue harassment warnings to perpetrators, police officers appear to use this as their first strategy in combating harassment. However, issuing harassment warnings may be more difficult, especially in cases where the perpetrator has concealed their identity. Furthermore, unless an incident of cyber-harassment explicitly threatens the victim's safety, it is unlikely that police officers will devote resources to tracing the perpetrator's identity. The complexity of the application of the Act to cases involving cyber-harassment may cause victims greater confusion, resulting in disillusionment with, and lack of faith in the criminal justice system. Ultimately, this may result in a greater likelihood that victims will not approach the police for help in dealing with instances of cyber-harassment. More detailed guidelines are required, stipulating the coverage of the Act and police guidelines and procedures should be more transparent to Internet users. This may increase satisfaction with the criminal justice system, and the likelihood that victims will contact the police for help in dealing with cyber-harassment.

8.5 Future Research

The following list presents potential avenues for future research that can expand on the findings of this research, and further understanding of issues relating to cyber-harassment. Future research should consider the following:

- Following from the just world hypothesis (Lerner & Miller, 1978), individuals may be more inclined to blame male victims of cyber-harassment compared to female victims, as male victims do not conform to stereotypical views of cyber-harassment. Research would benefit by conducting a vignette study which manipulates the gender of perpetrators and victims and measuring the degree to which the perpetrators or victims are blamed for instances of cyber-harassment.
- Victim-blaming tendencies may be associated with the degree to which victims use the Internet. Research would benefit from manipulation of the victim's internet usage and measuring the degree to which victims are blamed for their cyber-harassing experiences, and empathy for the impact of cyber-harassment.

- Research would benefit from exploring perceptions of perpetrators of cyber-harassment by manipulating the prior victim-perpetrator relationship. For instance, ex-intimates who engage in cyber-harassing behaviours may be perceived more sympathetically than strangers who engage in cyber-harassment. Furthermore, research should ascertain whether sympathy towards the perpetrator is affected by the perpetrator's attempts to conceal their identity.
- Future research should focus on exploring the relationship between the type and severity of threats made by perpetrators of cyber-harassment, and the perceptions about the credibility of threats made.
- Examining individuals' attachments to their social networking profiles and determining the types of information they are willing to disclose/not disclose, and who they feel comfortable disclosing information to. This research would contribute to identifying methods by which users of social networking sites could be educated about the potential risk of cyber-harassment.
- Recruiting cyber-harassed victims who have contacted the police about their experiences, with particular focus on the remedies offered by the police, and the perceived usefulness of remedies offered.
- Finally, as this research recruited undergraduate students, it is essential to widen the target population to include a more diverse range of Internet users, and explore their experiences of cyber-harassment.

8.6 Summary

This research produced apparently inconsistent findings in relation to the perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours. Whilst some behaviours associated with cyber-harassment were perceived as criminal (such as sending malicious software), participants were unsure about the criminality of other behaviours (such as behaviours associated with deception/disclosure). However, inspection of the factors that emerged in Study 1 and the

findings of Studies 2 and 3 suggest some criteria that need to be met for participants to perceive cyber-harassment as criminal. If the perpetrator's behaviour explicitly threatens the victim's computer, software, personal information and/or the behaviour could be prosecuted as a single offence, and/or the behaviour escalates into an offline form, the behaviour is likely to be perceived as criminal. If the perpetrator's behaviour is innocuous, ambiguous, has no obvious malicious intent, or threats are veiled, the behaviour is less likely to be perceived as criminal. Furthermore, victims may suffer secondary victimisation as their peers may blame their computer use or lifestyle for their cyber-harassment.

This thesis also demonstrates that individuals do suffer from cyber-harassment. Victims and police officers believed cyber-harassment was likely to be perpetrated someone known to victims and was likely to be caused by the initiation or dissolution of romantic relationships. In contrast, non-victims held the expectation that perpetrators were likely to be strangers to their victims. Not all participants in Study 2 felt that their experiences equated to harassment. However, some felt their experiences had negatively affected their daily lives, and reported symptoms that appeared to fall along the post-traumatic stress spectrum. The findings reported here also suggest that cyber-harassed victims may not have reliable support networks to help them cope with their experiences. Non-victims suggested they would offer a cyber-harassed victim support but this was dependent on their knowledge of the victim and the availability of evidence of any incidences that had occurred. Furthermore, non-victims were likely to blame cyber-harassed victims for their experiences. Police officers showed willingness to help cyber-harassed victims but perceived victims as unhelpful and in some instances a hindrance to their own cases if they were reported. However, the availability of police support to cyber-harassed victims was dependent on the immediacy of physical threat to victims. This highlights the precarious position that cyber-harassed victims may face. The findings of this thesis make a significant contribution to this field of research, and highlights opportunities for further research so that cyber-harassment and the impact it has on individuals may be more fully understood.

References

- Agatston, P. W., Kowalski, R., & Limber, S. (2007). Students' perspectives on cyber bullying. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 41*, 59-60.
- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1989). Attachments beyond infancy. *American Psychologist, 44*, 709-716.
- Alexy, E., M., Burgess, A. W., Baker, T., & Smoyak, S. A. (2005). Perceptions of cyberstalking among college students. *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention, 5*, 279-289.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed., text revision). Washington, DC: Author.
- Amichai-Hamburger, Y., Wainapel, G., & Fox, S. (2002). "On the Internet no one knows I'm an introvert": Extraversion, neuroticism, and Internet interaction. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior, 5*, 125-128.
- Ashmore, R., Jones, J., Jackson, A., & Smoyak, S. (2006). A survey of mental health nurses' experiences of stalking. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, 13*, 562-569.
- Bagozzi, R. P. (1992). The self-regulation of attitudes, intentions, and behaviour. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 55*, 178-204.
- Bagozzi, R. P., Baumgartner, H., Pieters, R. (1998). Goal-directed emotions. *Cognition and Emotion, 12*, 1-26.
- Bagozzi, R. P., Edwards, E. A. (2000). Goal-striving and the implementation of goal intentions in the regulation of body weight. *Psychology and Health, 15*, 255-270.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York: Freeman.
- Baron, J., & Siepmann, M. (2000). Techniques for creating and using web questionnaires in research and teaching. In M. Birnbaum (Ed.), *Psychological Experiments on the Internet*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Bartram, D., Hagger-Johnson, G., Hewson, C., Joinson, A., Mackintosh, B., & O'Dell, L. J. (2007). *Report of the Working Party on Conducting Research on the Internet: Guidelines for Ethical Practice in Psychological Research Online*. Leicester, UK: British Psychological Society.
- Basu, S., & Jones, R. P. (2007). Regulating cyberstalking. In F. Schmallegger & M. Pittaro. (Eds.). *Crimes of the Internet*. UK: Prentice Hall.

- Bekkers, R. (2007). Measuring altruistic behaviour in surveys: The all-or-nothing dictator game. *Survey Research Methods*, 1, 139–144.
- Bjerregaard, B. (2000). An empirical study of stalking victimization. *Violence & Victims*, 15, 389-406.
- Birnbaum, M. H. (2004). Human research and data collection via the Internet. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55, 803-832.
- Blaauw, E., Winkel, F. W., Arensman, E., Sheridan, L., & Freeve, A. (2002). The toll of stalking: the relationship between features of stalking and psychopathology of victims. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 17, 50–63.
- Blaikie, N. (1991). A critique of the use of triangulation in social research. *Quality & Quantity*, 25, 115-136.
- Block, J. (1995). A contrarian view of the five-factor approach to personality description. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 187-215.
- Biocca, F., Harms, C., & Burgoon, J. K. (2003). Toward a more robust theory and measure of social presence: review and suggested criteria. *Presence*, 12, 456–480.
- Bocij, P. (2003) Victims of cyberstalking: An exploratory study of harassment perpetrated via the Internet. *First Monday*, 8, Article 10. Retrieved August 21, 2006, from: www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue8_10/bocij/index.html.
- Bocij, P. (2004). *Cyberstalking: Harassment in the Internet Age and How to Protect Your Family*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.
- Bocij, P., Bocij, H., & McFarlane, L. (2003). Cyberstalking: A case study of serial harassment in the UK. *British Journal of Forensic Practice*, 5, 25-32.
- Bocij, P., Griffiths, M., & McFarlane, L. (2002). Cyberstalking: A new challenge for criminal law. *The Criminal Lawyer*, 122, 3-5.
- Bocij, P., & McFarlane, L. (2002). Online harassment: Towards a definition of cyberstalking. *Prison Service Journal*, 139, 31-38.
- Bocij, P. & McFarlane, L. (2003). Cyberstalking: a matter for community safety – but the numbers do not add up. *Community Safety Journal*, 2, 26-34.
- Bolger, N., & Zuckerman, A. (1995). A framework for studying personality in the stress process. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 69, 890-902.
- Bono, J. E., Boles, T. L., Judge, T. A., & Lauver, K. J. (2002). The role of personality in task and relationship conflict. *Journal of Personality*, 70, 311-344.

- Boon, J., & L. Sheridan, L. (2002). *Stalking and Psychosexual Obsession: Psychological Perspectives for Prevention, Policing and Treatment*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and Loss: Vol. II: Separation, anxiety and anger*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and Loss: Vol. III: Loss, sadness and depression*. New York: Basic Books.
- boyd, d. (2006). Friends, friendsters, and top 8: writing community into being on social network sites. *First Monday 11, Article 10*. Retrieved March, 26th, 2010, from: <http://www.firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/lm/article/view/1418/1336>.
- Braumeister, R. F., Wotman, S. R., & Stillwell, A. M. (1993). Unrequited love: On heartbreak, anger, guilt, scriptlessness, and humiliation. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 64, 377-394.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77–101.
- British Psychological Society. (2009). *Code of Ethics and Conduct: Guidelines Published by the Ethics Committee of the British Psychological Society*. Leicester, UK: BPS.
- Brocki, J. M., & Wearden, A. J. (2006). A critical evaluation of the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in health psychology. *Psychology & Health*, 21, 87–108.
- Brown, H. (2000). *Stalking and Other Forms of Harassment: An Investigator's Guide*. Metropolitan Police Service. London, UK: Home Office.
- Brownlow, C., & O'Dell, L. (2002). Ethical issues for qualitative research in on-line communities. *Disability & Society*, 17, 685 – 694.
- Bryman, A. (1984). The debate about quantitative and qualitative research: A question of method or epistemology? *British Journal of Sociology*, 35, 78 – 92.
- Bryman, A. (2006). Integrating quantitative and qualitative research: how is it done? *Qualitative Research*, 6(1), 9 – 25.
- Buchanan, T. (2002). Online assessment: Desirable or dangerous? *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 33, 148-154.
- Buchanan, T., Ali, T., Heffernan, T. M., Ling, J., Parrott, A. C., Rogers, J., & Scholey, A. B. (2005). Non-equivalence of online and paper-and-pencil psychological tests: the

- case of the prospective memory questionnaire. *Behavior Research Methods*, 37, 148–154.
- Buchanan, T., Johnson, J. A., & Goldberg, L. R. (2005). Implementing a five-factor personality inventory for use on the Internet. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 21, 115-127.
- Buchanan, T., & Smith, J. L. (1999). Using the Internet for psychological research: Personality testing on the World Wide Web. *British Journal of Psychology*, 90, 125-144.
- Budd, T., & Mattinson, J. (2000). *The extent and nature of stalking: Findings from the 1998 British Crime Survey*. (Home Office Research, Research Study No. 210). London: Research Development and Statistics Directorate.
- Burgess, A. W., & Baker, T. (2002). *Cyberstalking*. In J. Boon, & L. Sheridan (Eds.), *Stalking and Psychosexual Obsession: Psychological Perspectives for Prevention, Policing and Treatment*. West Sussex: Wiley.
- Burgess, A. W., Baker, T., Greening, D., Hartman, C. R., Burgess, A. G., Douglas, J. E., & Halloran, R. (1997). Stalking behaviors within domestic violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 12, 389–403.
- Busher, H., & James, N. (2007). *Email communication as a technology of oppression: attenuating identity in online research*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the British Sociological Association, London: University of London, 12-14th April 2007.
- Chapman, E., & Smith, J. A. (2002). Interpretative phenomenological analysis and the new genetics. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 7, 125–130.
- Chen, P., & Hinton, S. M. (1999) Realtime interviewing using the World Wide Web. *Sociological Research Online*, 4. Accessed on 14th November 2008 from <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/4/3/chen.html>
- Church, A. H. (1993). Estimating the effect of incentives on mail survey response rates: A meta-analysis. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 57, 62–79.
- Clark, J., Boccaccini, M. T., Caillouet, B., & Chaplin, W. F. (2007). Five factor model personality traits, jury selection, and case outcomes in criminal and civil cases. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 34, 641-660.

- Coffey, B., & Woolworth, S. (2004). "Destroy the scum, and then neuter their families": the web forum as a vehicle for community discourse? *The Social Science Journal*, 41, 1-14.
- Coleman, F. L. (1997). Stalking behaviour and the cycle of domestic violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 12, 420-432.
- Conley, J. J. (1985). Longitudinal stability of personality traits: A multitrait-multimethod-multioccasion analysis. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 49, 1266-1282.
- Cook, C., Heath, F., & Thompspon, R. L. (2000). A meta-analysis of response rates in web- or internet-based surveys. *Emotional and Psychological Measurement*, 60, 821-836.
- Coyne, I., Seigne, E., & Randall, P. (2000). Predicting workplace victim status from personality. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 9, 335-349.
- Crow, S. M., Hartman, S. J., Hammond, D., & Fok, L. Y. (1995). The impact of personality factors on sexual and non-sexual harassment sensitivity. *Women in Management Review*, 10, 9-19.
- Cupach, W. R., & Spitzberg, B. H. (2004). *The Dark Side of Relationship Pursuit: From Attraction to Obsession and Stalking*. Mahway, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- D'Ovidio, R., & Doyle, J. (2003). A study on cyberstalking: Understanding investigative hurdles. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 72, 10-17.
- Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1986). Organizational information requirements, media richness, and structural design. *Management Science*, 32, 554-571.
- Davis, R. N. (1999). Web-based administration of a personality questionnaire: Comparison with traditional methods. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments & Computers*, 31, 572-577.
- Davis, K. E., Ace, A., & Andra, M. (2002). Stalking perpetrators and psychological maltreatment of partners: Anger-jealousy, attachment insecurity, need for control, and break-up context. In K. E. Davis, I. H. Frieze & R. D. Maiuro. (Eds.), *Stalking: Perspectives on Victims and Perpetrators*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Davis, M., Bolding, G., Hart, G., Sherr, L., & Elford, J. (2004). Reflecting on the experiences of interviewing online: perspectives from the Internet and HIV study in London. *AIDS Care*, 16, 944-952.

- deBecker, G. (2002). I was trying to let him down easy. In J. Boon & L. Sheridan (Eds.), *Stalking and Psychosexual Obsession: Psychological Perspectives for Prevention, Policing and Treatment*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Deirmenjian, J. M. (1999). Stalking in cyberspace. *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 27, 407-413.
- Dennison, S. M., & Thomson, D. M. (2002). Identifying stalking: the relevance of intent in commonsense reasoning. *Law & Human Behavior*, 26, 543-561.
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40, 314-321.
- Dijkstra, M. T. M., van Dierendonck, D., Evers, A., & De Dreu, C. K. W. (2005). Conflict and well-being at work: the moderating role of personality. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 20, 87-104.
- Dilley, P. (2004). Interviews and the philosophy of qualitative research. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 75, 127-132.
- Dombrowkis, S. C., LeMasney, J. W., Dickson, S. A., & Ahia, C. E. (2004). Protecting children from online sexual predators: Technological, psychoeducational, and legal considerations. *Professional Psychology, Research and Practice*, 35, 65-73.
- Douglas, K. S., & Dutton, D. G. (2001). Assessing the link between stalking and domestic violence. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 6, 519-546.
- Draucker, C. B. (1999). "Living in hell": The experience of being stalked. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 20, 473-484.
- Dubrovsky, V. J., Kiesler, S., & Sethna, B. N. (1991). The equalization phenomenon: Status effects in computer-mediated and face-to-face decision-making groups. *Human-Computer Interaction*, 6, 119-146.
- Dutton, W. H., Helsper, E. J., & Gerber, M. M. (2009). *Oxford Internet Survey 2009 Report: The Internet in Britain*. Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford. Oxford: UK.
- Dutton, W., & Helsper, E. J. (2007). *The Internet in Britain: 2007*. Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford. Oxford: UK.
- Eastin, M. S., & LaRose, R. (2000). Internet self-efficacy and the psychology of the digital divide. *Journal of Computer-Mediated communication*, 6. Retrieved August 5th, 2008 from: <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol6/issue1/eastin.html>

- Eatough, V., & Smith, J. (2006). 'I was like a wild wild person': understanding feelings of anger using interpretative phenomenological analysis. *British Journal of Psychology*, 97, 483–498.
- Ellison, L. (1999). *Cyberstalking: Tackling harassment on the Internet*. Paper presented at 14th Bileta Conference: Cyberspace 1999: Crime, Criminal Justice and the Internet, York: England, 29-30 March.
- Feather, M. (1999). *Internet and Child Victimisation*. Paper presented at the Children and Crime: Victims and Offenders Conference convened by the Australian Institute of Criminology and held in Brisbane 17–18 June 1999.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson.
- Festinger, L., Pepitone, A., & Newcomb, T. (1952). Some consequences of de-individuation in a group. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 47, 382–389.
- Field, A. (2005). *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS* (2nd Ed.). Sussex, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Finkelhor, D., Mitchell, K. J., & Wolak, J. (2000). *Online victimization: A report on the Nation's Youth*. (National Centre for Missing & Exploited Children). US: Department of Justice.
- Finn, J. (2004). A survey of online harassment at a university campus. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 19, 468–483.
- Finney, A. (2006). *Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the 2004/05 British crime survey*. No. Home Office Online Report 12/06. UK: Home Office Online Report. Retrieved on April 24, 2006
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/rdsolr1206.pdf>
- Folkman, S., Lazarus, R. S., Dunkel-Schetter, C., DeLongis, A., & Gruen, R. J. (1986). Dynamics of a stressful encounter: cognitive appraisal, coping, and encounter outcomes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50, 992–1003.
- Fremouw, W. J., Westrup, D., Pennypacker, J. (1997). Stalking on campus: The prevalence and strategies for coping with stalking. *Journal of Forensic Science*, 42, 66–669.
- Fricker Jnr., R. D., & Schonlau, M. (2002). Advantages and disadvantages of Internet research surveys: evidence from the literature. *Field Methods*, 14, 347–367.
- Gati, A., Tenyi, T., Tury, F., & Wildmann, M. (2002). Anorexia Nervosa following sexual harassment on the Internet: A case report. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 3, 474–477.

- Gilleard, C., & Higgs, P. (2008). Internet use and the digital divide in the English longitudinal study of ageing. *European Journal of Ageing*, 5, 233–239.
- Giorgi, A., & Giorgi, B. (2008). Phenomenology. In J. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Glaser, L., Matthiessen, S. B., Nielsen, M. B., & Einarsen, S. (2007). Do targets of workplace bullying portray a general victim personality? *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 48, 313–319.
- Goldberg, D. P., & Hillier, V. F. (1979). A scaled version of the General Health Questionnaire. *Psychological Medicine*, 9, 139–145.
- Görz, A. S. (2006). Incentives in web studies: methodological issues and a review. *International Journal of Internet Science*, 1, 58–70.
- Gosling, S. D., Vazire, S., Srivastava, S., & John, O. P. (2004). Should we trust web-based studies? A comparative analysis of six preconceptions about Internet questionnaires. *American Psychologist*, 59, 93–104.
- Granello, D. H., & Wheaton, J. E. (2004). Online data collection: Strategies for research. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 82, 387–393.
- Graziano, W. G., Jensen-Campbell, L. A., & Hair, E. C. (1996). Perceiving interpersonal conflict and reacting to it: The case for agreeableness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 820–835.
- Greene, J., & McClintock, C. (1985). Triangulation in evaluation: design and analysis issues. *Evaluation Review*, 9, 523–545.
- Griffiths, M. (1999). Cyberstalking: a cause for police concern? *Justice of the Peace*, 163, 687 – 689.
- Griffiths, M., Rogers, L., & Sparrow, P. (1998). Crime and IT: “Stalking the Net”. *Probation Journal*, 45, 138–141.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London, UK: Sage.
- Gunther, K. C., Cohen, L. H., & Armeli, S. (1999). The role of neuroticism in daily stress and coping. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, 1087–1100.
- Hammersley, M. (2000). The relationship between qualitative and quantitative research: paradigm loyalty versus methodological eclecticism. In J. T. E. Richardson (Ed.),

- Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods: For Psychology and the Social Sciences*. Leicester, UK: BPS.
- Harris, J. (2000). *An evaluation of the use and effectiveness of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997*. (Home Office Research, Research Study 203). London: Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.
- Hartmann, T., & Vorderer, P. (2010). It's okay to shoot a character: Moral disengagement in violent video games. *Journal of Communication*, 60, 94-119.
- Henwood, K. L. (2000). Qualitative inquiry: perspectives, methods and psychology. In J. T. E. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods: For Psychology and the Social Sciences*. Leicester, UK: BPS.
- Hewson, C., & Charlton, J. P. (2005). Measuring health beliefs on the internet: A comparison of paper and Internet administrations of the multidimensional health locus of control scale. *Behavior Research Methods*, 37, 691-702.
- Hewson, C., Yule, P., Laurent, D., & Vogel, C. (2003). *Internet Research Methods: A Practical Guide for the Social and Behavioural Sciences*. London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Hills, A. M., & Taplin, J. L. (1998). Anticipated responses to stalking: Effect of threat and target-stalker relationship. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 5, 139-146.
- Hines, D. A., & Saudino, K. J. (2008). Personality and intimate partner aggression in dating relationships: the role of the "Big Five". *Aggressive Behavior*, 34, 593-604.
- Home Office. (1988). *Malicious Communications Act 1988*. London: HMSO.
- Home Office. (1990). *Computer Misuse Act 1990*. London: HMSO.
- Home Office. (1997). *Protection from Harassment Act 1997*. London: HMSO.
- Home Office. (2001). *Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001*. London: HMSO.
- Home Office. (2003). *Sexual Offences Act 2003*. London: HMSO.
- Hussain, Z., & Griffiths, M. D. (2009). The attitudes, feelings and experiences of online gamers: A qualitative analysis. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 12, 747-753.
- Janoff-Bulman, R. (1979). Characterological versus behavioral self-blame: Inquiries into depression and rape. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37, 1789-1809.
- Jason, L. A., Reichler, A., Easton, J., Neal, A., & Wilson, M. (1984). Female harassment after ending a relationship: a preliminary study. *Alternative Lifestyles*, 6, 259-269.

- Jerin, R., & Dolinsky, B. (2001). You've got mail! You don't want it: Cyber-victimization and on-line dating. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 9, 15–21.
- Johnson, R. B., & Onweugbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: a research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Research*, 33, 14–26.
- Joinson, A. (1999). Social desirability, anonymity and Internet-based questionnaires. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments & Computers*, 31, 433–438.
- Joinson, A. (2001a). Knowing me, knowing you: Reciprocal self-disclosure in Internet-based surveys. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 4, 587–591.
- Joinson, A. N. (2001b). Self-disclosure in computer-mediated communication: The role of self-awareness and visual anonymity. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 31, 177–192.
- Joinson, A. N. (2006). Internet behaviour and the design of virtual methods. In C. Hine (Ed.). *Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet*. Oxford, UK: Berg.
- Joinson, A. N., & Reips, U-D. (2007). Personalized salutation, power of sender and response rates to web-based surveys. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 23, 1372–1383.
- Jones, C., & Aronson, E. (1973). Attribution of fault to a rape victim as a function of respectability of the victim. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 26, 415–419.
- Kahn, A. S., Jackson, J., Kully, C., Badger, K., & Halvorsen, J. (2003). Calling it rape: differences in experiences of women who do or do not label their sexual assault as rape. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 27, 233–242.
- Kamphuis, J. H., Emmelkamp, P. M. G., & de Vries, V. (2004). Informant personality descriptions of postintimate stalkers using the five factor profile. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 82, 169–178.
- Kamphuis, J. H., Galeazzi, G. M., DeFazio, L., Emmelkamp, P. M. G., Farnham, F., Groenen, A., James, D., & Vervaeke, G. (2005). Stalking – perceptions and attitudes amongst helping professionals. An EU cross-national comparison. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 12, 215–225.
- Kang, S. (2007). Disembodiment in online social interaction: impact of online chat on social support and psychosocial well-being. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 10, 475–477.

- Kaye, B. K., & Johnson, T. J. (1999). Research methodology: Taming the cyber-frontier. Techniques for improving online surveys. *Social Science Computer Review*, 17, 323–337.
- Kenney, J. S. (2002). Victims of crime and labeling theory: a parallel process? *Deviant Behavior: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 23, 235-265.
- Kienlen, K. K. (1998). Developmental and social antecedents of stalking. In J. R. Meloy (Ed.), *The psychology of stalking: Clinical and forensic perspectives*. San Diego, California: Academic Press.
- Kienlen, K. K., Birmingham, D. L., Solberg, K. B., O'Regan, J. T., & Meloy, J. R. (1997). A comparative study of psychotic and nonpsychotic stalking. *The journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 25, 317-334.
- Kiesler, S., Siegel, J., & McGuire, T. W. (1984). Social psychological aspects of computer-mediated communication. *American Psychologist*, 39, 1123-1134.
- Kiesler, S., & Sproull, L. S. (1986). Response effects in the electronic survey. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 50, 402–413.
- King, E. (2000). The use of the self in qualitative research. In J. T. E. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods: For Psychology and the Social Sciences*. Leicester, UK: BPS.
- Kowalski, R. M., & Limber, S. P. (2007). Electronic bullying among middle school students. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 41, 22–30.
- Krantz, J. H. (2000). Tell me, what did you see? The stimulus on computers. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments & Computers*, 32, 221–229.
- Krantz, J., H., & Dalal, R. (2000). Validitiy of web-based psychological research. In M. Birnbaum (Ed.), *Psychological Experiments on the Internet*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Kraut, R., Olson, J., Banaji, M., Bruckman, A., Cohen, J., & Couper, M. (2004). Psychological research online: Report of board of scientific affairs' advisory group on the conduct of research on the Internet. *American Psychologist*, 59, 105-17.
- Krosnick, J. A. (1999). Survey research. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50, 537 – 567.
- Kuper, A., Lingard, L., & Levinson, W. (2008). Qualitative research: critically appraising qualitative research. *British Medical Journal*, 337, 677-692.
- Larkin, M., & Griffiths, M. D. (2002). Experiences of addiction and recovery: The case for subjective accounts. *Addiction Research and Theory*, 1, 281-311.

- Larkin, M., & Griffiths, M. D. (2004). Dangerous sports and recreational drug-use: Rationalising and contextualising risk. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 14*, 215-232.
- Latane, B., & Darley, J. M. (1969). Bystander apathy. *American Scientist, 57*, 244–268.
- Lavie, M., & Willig, C. (2005). “I don’t feel like melting butter”: an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the experience of ‘Inorgasmia’. *Psychology & Health, 20*, 115–128.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer.
- Lea, M., Spears, R., & deGroot, D. (2001). Knowing me, knowing you: anonymity effects on social identity processes within groups. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*, 526-537.
- Lerner, M. J., & Miller, D. T. (1978). Just world research and the attribution process: Looking back and ahead. *Psychological Bulletin, 85*, 1030–1051.
- Li, Q. (2007). New bottle but old wine: A research of cyberbullying in schools. *Computers in Human Behavior, 23*, 1777–1791.
- Liff, S., & Shepherd, A. (2004). *An evolving gender digital divide?* OII Issue Brief No 2. Oxford Internet Institute: Oxford.
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T. (1985). Updating Norman’s ‘adequacy taxonomy’: Intelligence and personality dimensions in natural language and in questionnaires. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 49*, 710-721.
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T. (1987). Validation of the five-factor model of personality across instruments and observers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52*, 81-90.
- McGrath, M. G., & Casey, E. (2002). Forensic psychiatry and the internet: Practical perspectives on sexual predators and obsessional harassers in cyberspace. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, 30*, 81-94.
- McKenna, P. (2007). The rise of cyberbullying. *New Scientist, 195*, 26-27.
- McKenna, K. Y. A., & Bargh, J. A. (2000). Plan 9 from cyberspace: The implications for the Internet for personality and social psychology. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 4*, 57-75.
- Madge, C., & O’Connor, H. (2002). Online with e-mums: exploring the Internet as a medium for research. *Area, 34*, 92-102.

- Mann, C., & Stewart, F. (2000). *Internet Communication and Qualitative Research: A Handbook for Researching Online*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Marshall, M. N. (1996). Sampling for qualitative research. *Family Practice*, 13, 522-525.
- Mason, J. (2006). Mixing methods in a qualitatively driven way. *Qualitative Research*, 6, 9-25.
- Mathy, R. M., Kerr, D. L., & Haydin, B. M. (2003). Methodological rigor and ethical considerations in Internet-mediated research. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 40, 77-85.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2002). Understanding and validity in qualitative research. In M. Huberman & M. B. Miles (Eds.), *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*. London, UK: Sage.
- Meloy, J. R. (1996). Stalking (obsessional following): A review of some preliminary studies. *Aggression & Violent Behavior*, 1, 147-162.
- Meloy, J. R. (1998). *The psychology of Stalking: Clinical and Forensic Perspectives*. London, UK: Academic Press.
- Meloy, J. R., & Gothard, S. (1995). A demographic and clinical comparison of obsessional followers and offenders with mental disorders. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 152, 258-263.
- Michell, J. (1997). Quantitative science and the definition of measurement in psychology. *British Journal of Psychology*, 88, 355-383.
- Michell, J. (2003). The quantitative imperative: positivism, naïve realism and the place of qualitative methods in psychology. *Theory & Psychology*, 13, 5-31.
- Mikkelsen, S. B., & Einarsen, S. (2002). Basic assumptions and symptoms of post-traumatic stress among victims of bullying at work. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 11, 87-111.
- Miles, M., & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. London, UK: Sage.
- Mor, N., & Winquist, J. (2002). Self-focused attention and negative affect: a meta analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128, 638-662.
- Moran-Ellis, J., Alexander, V. D., Cronin, A., Dickson, M., Fielding, J., Sleney, J., & Thomas, H. (2006). Triangulation and integration: processes, claims and implications. *Qualitative Research*, 6, 45-59.

- Morewitz, S. J. (2002). Characteristics of stalking victims and offenders. In S. J. Morewitz. *Stalking and Violence: New Patterns of Trauma and Obsession*. NJ, USA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Morgan, D. L. (2007). Paradigms lost and pragmatism regained: methodological implications of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1, 48–76.
- Morris, S., Anderson, S., & Murray, L. (2002). *Stalking and Harassment in Scotland*. Research Findings No. 67/2002. Scotland, UK: Scottish Executive.
- Mullen, P. E., Pathé, M., Purcell, R., & Stuart, G. W. (1999). Study of stalkers. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 156, 1244–1249.
- Mulveen, R., & Hepworth, J. (2006). An interpretative phenomenological analysis of participation in a pro-anorexia site and its relationship with disordered eating. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 11, 283–296.
- Nicastro, A. M., Cousins, A. V., & Spitzberg, B. H. (2000). The tactical face of stalking. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 28, 69–82.
- Niedenthal, P. M., Barsalou, L. W., Winkielman, P., Krauth-Gruber, S., & Ric, F. (2005). Embodiment in attitudes, social perception, and emotion. *Personality & Social Psychology Review*, 9, 184–211.
- Nolen-Hoeksema, S., Morrow, J., & Fredrickson, B. L. (1993). Response styles and the duration of episodes of depressed mood. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 102, 20–28.
- O'Connell, R., Price, J., & Barrow, C. (2004). *Cyberstalking, Abusive Cyber Sex and Online Grooming*. Centre for Cyberspace Research, Preston.
- O'Neil, K. M., & Penrod, S. D. (2001). Methodological variables in web-based research that may affect results: sample type, monetary incentives, and personal information. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, 33, 226–233.
- O'Quin, K., & Vogler, C. C. (1989). Effects of just world beliefs on perceptions of crime perpetrators and victims. *Social Justice Research*, 3, 47–56.
- Ogilvie, E. (2000a). Cyberstalking. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 166, 1–6.
- Ogilvie, E. (2000b). *The Internet and Cyberstalking*. Paper presented at the Stalking: Criminal Justice Responses Conference convened by the Australian Institute of Criminology and held in Sydney 7–8 December 2000.

- Ozer, E. M., & Bandura, A. (1990). Mechanisms governing empowerment effects: A self-efficacy analysis. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 58, 472-486.
- Parke, A., & Griffiths, M. (2005). Aggressive behaviour in adult slot machine gamblers: an interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 15, 1-18.
- Pathé, M. (2002). What is stalking? In M. Pathé (Ed.). *Surviving Stalking*. NY, USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Pathé, M., & Mullen, P. E. (1997). The impact of stalkers on their victims. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 170, 12-17.
- Pathé, M., Mullen, P. E., & Purcell, R. (1999). Stalking: False claims of victimization. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 174, 170-172.
- Paunovic, N., Lundh, L.-G., & Oest, L.-G. (2002). Attentional and memory bias for emotional information in crime victims with acute posttraumatic stress disorder. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 16, 675-692.
- Petch, E. (2002). Anti-stalking laws and the protection from harassment act 1997. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 13, 19-34.
- Perez, C. (1993). Stalking: when does obsession become a crime? *American Journal of Criminal Law*, 20, 263-280.
- Phillips, L., Quirk, R., Rosenfeld, B., & O'Connor, M. (2004). Is it stalking? Perceptions of stalking among undergraduates. *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, 31, 73-96.
- Plant, R. R., Hammond, N., & Whitehouse, T. (2003). How choice of mouse may affect response timing in psychological studies. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments & Computers*, 35, 276-284.
- Purcell, R., Pathé, M., & Mullen, P. E. (2004). When do repeated intrusions become stalking? *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 15, 571-583.
- Quayle, E., & Taylor, M. (2001). Child seduction and self-representation on the Internet. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 4, 597-608.
- Raziano, D. B., Jayadevappa, R., Valenzuela, D., Weiner, M., & Lavizzo-Mourey, R. (2001). E-mail versus conventional postal mail survey of geriatric chiefs. *The Gerontologist*, 41, 799-804.
- Reips, U. D. (2000). The web experimentation method: advantages, disadvantages and solutions. In M. Birnbaum (Ed.). *Psychological Experiments on the Internet*. San Diego: Academic Press.

- Rice, R. E. (1992). Task analyzability, use of media, and effectiveness: a multi-site exploration of media richness. *Organization Science*, 3, 475–500.
- Roberts, A., R., & Dziegielewski, S. F. (1996). Assessment typology and intervention with survivors of stalking. *Aggression & Violent Behavior*, 1, 359–368.
- Rogers, P., & Lea, M. (2005). Social presence in distributed group environments: the role of social identity. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 24, 151–158.
- Salter, M., & Bryden, C. (2009). I can see you: harassment and stalking on the Internet. *Information & Communications Technology Law*, 18, 99–122.
- Saunders, R. (1998). The legal perspective on stalking. In J. R. Meloy (Ed.), *The psychology of stalking: Clinical and forensic perspectives*. San Diego, California: Academic Press.
- Scheuermann, L., & Taylor, G. (1997). Netiquette. *Internet Research*, 7, 269–273.
- Schleyer, T. K. L., & Forrest, J. L. (2000). Methods for the design and administration of web-based surveys. *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association*, 7, 416–425.
- Schmidt, W. C. (1997). World-Wide Web survey research: Benefits, potential problems, and solutions. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments & Computers*, 29, 274–279.
- Schwarzer, R., Mueller, J., & Greenglass, E. (1999). Assessment of perceived general self-efficacy on the Internet: Data collection in cyberspace. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping*, 12, 145–161.
- Scott, A. J., Lloyd, R., & Gavin, J. (2010). The influence of prior relationship on the perceptions of stalking in the United Kingdom and Australia. *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, 37, 1185–1194.
- Seamark, D. A., Blake, S. D., Seamark, C. J., & Haplin, D. M. G. (2004). Living with severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD): perceptions of patients and their carers. *Palliative Medicine*, 18, 619 – 625.
- Selwyn, N., & Robson, K. (1998). Using e-mail as a research tool. *Social Research Update*, 21. Accessed on 10th December 2008 from <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU21.html>
- Seymour, W. S. (2001). In the flesh or online? Exploring qualitative research methodologies. *Qualitative Research*, 1, 147–168.
- Sheridan, L. P., Blaauw, E., & Davies, G. H. (2003). Stalking: Knowns and unknowns. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 4, 148–162.

- Sheridan, L., & Davies, G. M. (2001a). Violence and the prior victim-stalker relationship. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, 11, 102-116.
- Sheridan, L., & Davies, G. M. (2001b). Stalking: the elusive crime. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 6, 133-147.
- Sheridan, L., & Davies, G. M. (2001c). What is stalking? The match between legislation and public perception. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 6, 3-17.
- Sheridan, L., Davies, G., & Boon, J. (2001a). The course and nature of stalking: A victim perspective. *The Howard Journal*, 40, 215-234.
- Sheridan, L., Davies, G. M., & Boon, J. C. W. (2001b). Stalking: perceptions and prevalence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 16, 151-167.
- Sheridan, L., Gillett, R., & Davies, G. (2002). Perceptions and prevalence of stalking in a male sample. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 8, 289-310.
- Sheridan, L., Gillett, R., Davies, G. M., Blaauw, E., & Patel, D. (2003). 'There's no smoke without fire': Are male ex-partners perceived as more 'entitled' to stalk than acquaintance or stranger stalkers? *British Journal of Psychology*, 94, 87-98.
- Sheridan, L. P., & Grant, T. (2007). Is cyberstalking different? *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 13, 627-640.
- Skoler, G. (1998). The archetypes and the psychodynamics of stalking. In J. R. Meloy (Ed.), *The psychology of stalking: Clinical and forensic perspectives*. San Diego, California: Academic Press.
- Smartt, U. (2001). The stalking phenomenon: trends in European and International stalking and harassment legislation. *European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law & Criminal Justice*, 9, 209-232.
- Smith, J. A. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology. *Psychology & Health*, 11, 261-271.
- Smith, J. A. (1999). Towards a relational self: social engagement during pregnancy and psychological preparation for motherhood. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 38, 409-426.
- Smith, J. A. (2000). Evolving issues for qualitative psychology. In J. T. E. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods: For Psychology and the Social Sciences*. Leicester, UK: BPS.

- Smith, J. A. (2004). Reflecting on the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 1*, 39–54.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Smith, J. A., Jarman, M., & Osborn, M. (1999). Doing interpretative phenomenological analysis. In M. Murray & K. Chamberlain (Eds.), *Qualitative health psychology: Theories and methods*. London: Sage.
- Smith, M. A., & Leigh, B. (1997). Virtual subjects: Using the Internet as an alternative source of subjects and research environment. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments & Computers, 29*, 496–505.
- Smith, J., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Spears, R., Lea, M., & Postmes, T. (2007). Computer-mediated communication and social identity. In A. Joinson, K. McKenna, T. Postmes, & U-D. Reips (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Psychology*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Spitzberg, B. H., & Cadaz, M. (2002). The media construction of stalking stereotypes. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture, 9*, 128–149.
- Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (2003). What mad pursuit? Obsessive relational intrusion and stalking related phenomenon. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 8*, 345–375.
- Spitzberg, B. H., & Hoobler, G. (2002). Cyberstalking and the technologies of interpersonal terrorism. *New Media & Society, 4*, 71–92.
- Spitzberg, B. H., & Veksler, A. E. (2007). The personality of pursuit: Personality attributions of unwanted pursuers and stalkers. *Violence and Victims, 22*, 275–289.
- Sproull, L., & Kiesler, S. (1986). Reducing social context cues: electronic mail in organizational communication. *Management Science, 32*, 1492–1512.
- Stanton, J. M. (1998). An empirical assessment of data collection using the Internet. *Personnel Psychology, 51*, 709–725.
- Stieger, S., & Göritz, A. S. (2006). Using Instant Messenger for Internet-based interviews. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior, 9*, 552–559.

- Strickland, O. L., Moloney, M. F., Dietrich, A. S., Myerburg, S., Cotsonis, G. A., & Johnson, R. V. (2003). Measurement issues related to data collection on the World Wide Web. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 26, 246–256.
- Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 7, 321–326.
- Swickert, R. J., Hittner, J. B., Harris, J. L., & Herring, J. A. (2002). Relationships among Internet use, personality and social support. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 18, 437–451.
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (1996). *Using Multivariate Statistics* (3rd Ed.). California, USA: Harper Collins.
- Teddie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of Mixed Methods Research: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Thompson, S. C. (1981). Will it hurt less if I can control it? A complex answer to a simple question. *Psychological Bulletin*, 90, 89–101.
- Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (1998). *Stalking in America: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. No. 93-IJ-CX-0012. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Tjaden, P., Thoennes, N., & Allison, C. J. (2000). Comparing stalking victimisation from legal and victim perspectives. *Violence & Victims*, 15, 7–22.
- Tong, S., Van Der Heide, B., Langwell, L., & Walther, J. (2008). Too much of a good thing? The relationship between number of friends and interpersonal impressions on Facebook. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13, 531–549.
- Tonin, E. (2004). The attachment styles of stalkers. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 15, 584–590.
- Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the Screen: Identity in the age of the Internet*. New York, USA: Touchstone.
- Valor-Segura, I., Exposito, F., & Moya, M. (2011). Victim blaming and exoneration of the perpetrator in domestic violence. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 14, 195–206.
- Wall, D. S. (1998). Catching cybercriminals: Policing the Internet. *International Review of Law, Computers & Technology*, 12, 201–218.
- Wall, D. S., & Williams, M. (2007). Policing diversity in the digital age: Maintaining order in virtual communities. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 7, 391–415.

- Warwick, R., Joseph, S., Cordle, C., & Ashworth, P. (2004). Social support for women with chronic pain: what is helpful for whom? *Psychology and Health*, 19, 117-134.
- Whitty, M. T. (2007). Manipulation of self in cyberspace. In B. H. Spitzberg, & W. R. Cupach. (Eds.), *The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication* (2nd Ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Whitty, M. T., & Carr, A. N. (2003). Electronic bullying in the workplace. In B. Fisher, & C. Bowie (Eds.), *Workplace violence*. Devon, UK: Willan Publishing Ltd.
- Whitty, M. T., & Carr, A. (2006). *Cyberspace romance: The psychology of online relationships*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Whitty, M. T., & Joinson, A. N. (2009). *Truth, Lies and Trust on the Internet*. East Sussex, UK: Routledge.
- Williams, K. R., & Guerra, N. G. (2007). Prevalence and predictors of Internet bullying. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 41, S14-S21.
- Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology: Adventures in Theory and Method*. Philadelphia, USA: Open University Press.
- Winder, B., & Gough, B. (2010). 'I never touched anybody – that's my defence': a qualitative analysis of internet sex offender accounts. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 16, 125-141.
- Wood, R. T. A., & Griffiths, M. D. (2007). Online data collection from gamblers: Methodological issues. *International Journal of Mental Health Addiction*, 5, 151-163.
- Wood, R. A., & Wood, N. L. (2002). Stalking the stalker. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 71, 1-10.
- Yardley, L., & Bishop, F. (2008). Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: a pragmatic approach. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Yap, M. B. H., & Devilly, G. J. (2004). The role of perceived social support in crime victimization. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 24, 1-14.
- Ybarra, M. L. (2004). Linkages between depressive symptomatology and Internet harassment among young regular Internet users. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 7, 247-257.
- Zona, M. A., Sharma, K. K., & Lane, J. (1993). A comparative study of erotomaniac and obsessional subjects in a forensic sample. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 38, 894-903.

Zosky, D. L. (1999). The application of object relations theory to domestic violence.
Clinical Social Work Journal, 27, 55–69.

Appendix 1: Recruitment Email for Online Survey (Study 1)

To: [Insert relevant email addresses]

Subject: Perceptions and Experiences of Online Behaviours – Short survey for anyone interested in participating.

Dear Students,

You are invited to participate in a short research study which seeks to examine undergraduate student experiences and perceptions of online behaviours. The purpose of the study is to explore whether people perceive some online behaviours as criminal. In addition, the study will assess whether people experience the behaviours described, and whether these experiences were upsetting. You will be asked to provide some demographic information and answer four questions relating to a number of online behaviours. Participation in the study is voluntary but your participation would be very much appreciated.

The survey can be found using the following link (please click on the link and it will take you to the survey, which should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete):

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=n71700y2PU4UJTySv_2fs_2bmw_3d_3d

Please contact Catherine O'Neill at [insert email address] if you have any questions about the study, or you can contact Dr Belinda Winder at [insert email address], as her PhD supervisor.

Many thanks for your help, and sorry for the additional email if you are not interested in participating.

Catherine O'Neill

Appendix 2: Perceptions and Experiences of Online Behaviours: Background Information, Informed Consent and Survey (Study 1)

Background and Information Sheet

If you are an undergraduate student, living in England or Wales, you are invited to fill out this survey. The survey will examine your experiences and perceptions of negative cyber-behaviours.

Aims

The purpose of this study is to explore whether people perceive some cyber-behaviours as criminal. In addition, the study will assess whether people experience the behaviours described and whether these experiences are or were upsetting.

Funding

This study is being funded by Nottingham Trent University as part of a PhD project.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey that will take approximately 15 minutes. You will be asked to provide some demographic information and answer four questions relating to a number of online behaviours. You will be provided with the opportunity to take part in a second study which will be online interviews via an Instant Messaging service of your choosing. The data you provide will be combined with that from other participants.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The data you provide will be kept securely. You do not have to provide any information that could identify you. You will be asked to provide an email address if you wish to be considered for participation in a second study. Your email address will be held securely and separate from the survey data and will only be accessed by the researchers. All of the information you provide will be strictly confidential. You do not have to provide any information that can be used to identify you. Individuals will not be identified in any publication or presentation of the results.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary and it would be appreciated if you try to answer all of the questions. If you feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions or cannot answer some of the questions, any answers you provide will be helpful. You can withdraw from the study at any time prior to the data being analysed. To protect your anonymity, please note the number assigned to your survey as this will be used to withdraw your data, should you decide to withdraw after submission.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

Whilst there are no direct benefits to participating in this research, it is hoped that you will find participating an interesting experience. You will be asked to report on whether you have experienced some potentially upsetting behaviour. Whilst it is anticipated that you will not experience any distress from completing the survey, if you feel you are affected,

please call Nottingham Trent University Student Counselling services: City Campus 0115 848 6487, Clifton Campus 0115 848 6623, Brackenhurst Campus 0115 848 6623 (www.ntu.ac.uk/sss/counselling_service/).

Contact Details

The study is being conducted by Catherine O'Neill, a PhD student at Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham. If you have any questions about the research, you can email Catherine O'Neill *[insert email address]*. Alternatively, you can contact Catherine's supervisor, Dr. Monica Whitty on 0115 8485523 or email *[insert email address]*.

Thank you for your participation.

Declaration of Informed Consent

If you have read the background and information about the study and would like to proceed, please complete the following. If you do not wish to proceed, please close the browser.

1. I confirm that the purpose of the study has been explained to me prior to completing the survey, that I have been given information about it in writing, and that the researcher's contact details have been provided to me should I have any questions about the research.

☐ Yes
☐ No

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I have taken part in the research of my own free will.

☐ Yes
☐ No

3. I give my permission for the data I provide to be held securely by the researcher, on the understanding that the data will be destroyed at the end of the project.

☐ Yes
☐ No

4. I agree that the data can be stored and used for scientific research and in presentations in scientific journals and conferences, but not for any other purpose and any publication or presentation that uses the material will edit out any personal information that might allow me to be identified.

☐ Yes
☐ No

5. I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any stage prior to the data being analysed.

☐ Yes
☐ No

Withdrawal After Completion

Please enter a word in the space below. Should you wish to withdraw from the study after you have submitted your answers, please quote this word to the researcher.

Please note: you can withdraw up to the point of data analysis.

Demographics

1. Do you live in England or Wales?
☐ Yes
☐ No (If No, take participant to the end of the survey)
2. Are you an undergraduate student?
☐ Yes
☐ No (If No, take participant to the end of the survey)
3. Please give your age in years. (Drop down box from 18 to 100).
4. What is your gender? (*please select one*)
☐ Male
☐ Female
5. What is your sexual orientation? (*please select one*)
☐ Heterosexual
☐ Homosexual
☐ Bisexual
6. What is your relationship status? (*please select one*)
☐ Single
☐ Boyfriend/Girlfriend
☐ Cohabiting
☐ Married
☐ Divorced
☐ Separated
☐ Widowed

Section A

For the following items, there are phrases describing people's behaviours. Please use the rating scale provided to describe how accurately each statement describes you. Describe yourself as you generally are now, not as you wish to be in the future. Describe yourself as you honestly see yourself, in relation to other people you know of the same sex as you are, and roughly your same age.

	Very Inaccurate	Moderately Inaccurate	Neither Accurate nor Inaccurate	Very accurate
Have frequent mood swings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am not easily bothered by things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Believe in the importance of art	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am the life of the party	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am skilled in handling social situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am always prepared	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make plans and stick to them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dislike myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respect others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insult people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seldom feel blue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't like to draw attention to myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Carry out my plans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am not interested in abstract ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make friends easily	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tend to vote for liberal political candidates	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Know how to captivate people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Believe that others have good intentions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do just enough work to get by	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Find it difficult to get down to work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Panic easily	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Avoid philosophical discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accept people as they are	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not enjoy going to art museums	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pay attention to details	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Keep in the background	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feel comfortable with myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waste my time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get back at others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get chores done right away	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't talk a lot	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am often down in the dumps	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shirk my duties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not like art	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often feel blue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cut others to pieces	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have a good word for everyone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't see things through	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feel comfortable around people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have little to say	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section B

Using the scale provided, please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the statements.

A rating of 1 indicates that you strongly disagree and a rating of 7 indicates that you strongly agree.

Please select one response only for each statement.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I feel confident in understanding terms/words relating to Internet hardware	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident in understanding terms/words relating to Internet software	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident in describing functions of Internet hardware	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident in trouble shooting Internet problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident in explaining why a task will not run on the Internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident in using the Internet to gather data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident learning advanced skills within a specific Internet program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident turning to an on-line discussion group when help is needed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section C

For each of the following items, please indicate whether you think each of the behaviours are criminal.

	Please select one...
Sending numerous, unsolicited messages over a period of time via email, instant messenger, chat rooms, or internet discussion boards that are sexually explicit or obscene	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Sending numerous, unsolicited messages over a period of time via email, instant messenger, chat rooms, or internet discussion boards that are abusive and threatening	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Sending numerous, unsolicited text and multi-media messages to someone's mobile phone that are sexually explicit	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Sending numerous, unsolicited text and multi-media messages to someone's mobile phone that are abusive and threatening	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Sending another person's friends, family, or work colleagues messages via email to embarrass that person or damage their reputation	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal

	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Sending another person's friends, family, or work colleagues improper messages to their mobile phone to embarrass that person or damage their reputation	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Posting false information on the Internet about another person	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Posting another person's contact information on the Internet in a way that is soliciting sex	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Posting sexually explicit pictures on the Internet that have been changed to resemble another person	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Changing online identities/screen names to contact another person who has blocked their online contacts	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Telling someone information about the other person's offline lives that he/she did not disclose	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal

	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Encouraging other Internet users to be abusive or threatening to another person	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Sending another person malicious software that can damage their software and hardware	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Sending another person malicious software that can be used to access information on their computer	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Telling someone in an online 'chat' that they had followed them offline	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Using an identity/screen name similar to another person and contacting their friends to destroy their reputation	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit

	<input type="checkbox"/> criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Subscribing another person to online services that they did not want	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Spamming another person's email in an attempt to disrupt or disable their email	<input type="checkbox"/> Definitely criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> A little bit criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say

Please indicate whether you have experienced the following behaviours.

	Please select one...
Have you ever received numerous, unsolicited messages over a period of time via email, instant messenger, chat rooms, or internet discussion boards that were sexually explicit or obscene?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Have you ever received numerous, unsolicited messages over a period of time via email, instant messenger, chat rooms, or internet discussion boards that were abusive and threatening?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Have you ever received numerous, unsolicited text and multi-media messages to your mobile phone that were sexually explicit?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Have you ever received numerous, unsolicited text and multi-media messages to your mobile phone that were abusive and threatening?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Have your friends, family or work colleagues ever been sent messages via email by someone who wanted to embarrass you	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes

or damage your reputation?	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Have your friends, family or work colleagues ever been sent messages to their mobile phone by someone who wanted to embarrass you or damage your reputation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Has anyone ever posted false information on the Internet about you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Has anyone ever posted your contact information on the Internet in a way that solicited sex?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Has anyone ever posted sexually explicit pictures on the Internet that have been changed to resemble you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Has anyone ever changed their online identities/screen names to contact you because you have blocked their attempts to contact you online?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Has anyone ever told you information about your offline life that you did not disclose to that person?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Has anyone ever encouraged other Internet users to be abusive or threatening to you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Has anyone ever sent you malicious software that could damage your software and hardware?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Has anyone ever sent you malicious software that can be used to access information on your computer?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Has someone ever told you in an online 'chat' that he/she had	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable

followed you offline?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Has anyone ever used an identity or screen name similar to yours and contacted your friends to destroy your reputation?

- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Has anyone ever subscribed you to online services that you did not want?

- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Has anyone ever spammed your email in an attempt to disrupt or disable your email?

- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Prefer not to say

If you have experienced any of the behaviours described in the previous question, using the rating scale please indicate how upset you were by your experience(s).

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not										Extremely
upset										upset
at all										

If you experienced more than one of the behaviours described, do you think the same person carried out all of the behaviours?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Please imagine who you would report the following behaviours to if you experienced them? Please tick all that apply.

If you received numerous, unsolicited messages over a period of time via email, instant messenger, chat rooms, or internet discussion boards that were sexually explicit or obscene?

- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Internet service provider/mobile phone provider
- ☐ Internet moderator
- ☐ Police
- ☐ Doctor
- ☐ University
- ☐ No-one

	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> Other
If you received numerous, unsolicited messages over a period of time via email, instant messenger, chat rooms, or internet discussion boards that were abusive and threatening?	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Internet service provider/mobile phone provider <input type="checkbox"/> Internet moderator <input type="checkbox"/> Police <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor <input type="checkbox"/> University <input type="checkbox"/> No-one <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> Other
If you received numerous, unsolicited text and multi-media messages to your mobile phone that were sexually explicit?	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Internet service provider/mobile phone provider <input type="checkbox"/> Internet moderator <input type="checkbox"/> Police <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor <input type="checkbox"/> University <input type="checkbox"/> No-one <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> Other
If you received numerous, unsolicited text and multi-media messages to your mobile phone that were abusive and threatening?	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Internet service provider/mobile phone provider <input type="checkbox"/> Internet moderator <input type="checkbox"/> Police <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor <input type="checkbox"/> University <input type="checkbox"/> No-one <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> Other
If your friends, family, or work colleagues were sent messages via email by someone who wanted to embarrass you or damage your reputation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Internet service provider/mobile phone provider <input type="checkbox"/> Internet moderator <input type="checkbox"/> Police <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor <input type="checkbox"/> University <input type="checkbox"/> No-one <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> Other
If your friends, family or work colleagues were sent messages to their mobile phone by someone who	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Internet service provider/mobile phone

wanted to embarrass you or damage your reputation?

- provider
- ☐ Internet moderator
- ☐ Police
- ☐ Doctor
- ☐ University
- ☐ No-one
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other

If someone posted false information on the Internet about you?

- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Internet service provider/mobile phone provider
- ☐ Internet moderator
- ☐ Police
- ☐ Doctor
- ☐ University
- ☐ No-one
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other

If someone posted your contact information on the Internet in a way that solicited sex?

- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Internet service provider/mobile phone provider
- ☐ Internet moderator
- ☐ Police
- ☐ Doctor
- ☐ University
- ☐ No-one
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other

If someone posted sexually explicit pictures on the Internet that had been changed to resemble you?

- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Internet service provider/mobile phone provider
- ☐ Internet moderator
- ☐ Police
- ☐ Doctor
- ☐ University
- ☐ No-one
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other

If someone changed their online identities/screen names to contact you because you had blocked their attempts to contact you online?

- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Internet service provider/mobile phone provider
- ☐ Internet moderator
- ☐ Police
- ☐ Doctor
- ☐ University

	<input type="checkbox"/> No-one <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> Other
If someone told you information about your offline life that you did not disclose to that person?	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Internet service provider/mobile phone provider <input type="checkbox"/> Internet moderator <input type="checkbox"/> Police <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor <input type="checkbox"/> University <input type="checkbox"/> No-one <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> Other
If someone encouraged other Internet users to be abusive or threatening to you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Internet service provider/mobile phone provider <input type="checkbox"/> Internet moderator <input type="checkbox"/> Police <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor <input type="checkbox"/> University <input type="checkbox"/> No-one <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> Other
If someone sent you malicious software that could damage your software and hardware?	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Internet service provider/mobile phone provider <input type="checkbox"/> Internet moderator <input type="checkbox"/> Police <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor <input type="checkbox"/> University <input type="checkbox"/> No-one <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> Other
If someone sent you malicious software that could be used to access information on your computer?	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Internet service provider/mobile phone provider <input type="checkbox"/> Internet moderator <input type="checkbox"/> Police <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor <input type="checkbox"/> University <input type="checkbox"/> No-one <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> Other
If someone told you in an online 'chat' that he/she had followed you	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Family

offline?

- ☐ Internet service provider/mobile phone provider
- ☐ Internet moderator
- ☐ Police
- ☐ Doctor
- ☐ University
- ☐ No-one
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other

If someone used an identity or screen name similar to yours and contacted your friends to destroy your reputation?

- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Internet service provider/mobile phone provider
- ☐ Internet moderator
- ☐ Police
- ☐ Doctor
- ☐ University
- ☐ No-one
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other

If someone subscribed you to online services that you did not want?

- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Internet service provider/mobile phone provider
- ☐ Internet moderator
- ☐ Police
- ☐ Doctor
- ☐ University
- ☐ No-one
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other

If someone spammed your email in an attempt to disrupt or disable your email?

- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Internet service provider/mobile phone provider
- ☐ Internet moderator
- ☐ Police
- ☐ Doctor
- ☐ University
- ☐ No-one
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other

If you have selected 'Other' for any of the responses, please specify who you would report the experience to

Volunteers Required

Following this study, you may be invited to take part in an online interview. The interview will be conducted using any Instant Messenger service of your choosing, at a time to suit you. During the interview you will be asked about some of the information you have reported in this survey.

If you **would** like to be considered for this, please provide your email address. Please remember that all information you provide in this survey will remain confidential. If you **do not** want to be considered, **DO NOT** provide your email address.

My email address is _____

Please note: If you do not want to take part in an online interview, you **WILL NOT** receive unsolicited emails from the researcher.

If you do want to take part in an online interview, you **WILL NOT** receive emails from the researcher for any other purpose.

Debriefing

Thank you for completing this survey.

If you would like to withdraw your data from the study, please email Catherine O'Neill [*insert email address*] quoting the word you chose at the beginning of the survey. Alternatively, you can email Catherine's supervisor, Dr. Monica Whitty [*insert email address*].

Should you feel affected by completing the survey, please contact:
Nottingham Trent University Student Counselling Services
(www.ntu.ac.uk/sss/counselling_service). City Campus – 0115 848 6487. Clifton Campus – 0115 848 6623. Brackenhurst Campus – 0115 848 5292.

Many thanks for your help with this research – I sincerely appreciate the time and effort you have invested.

Catherine O'Neill

Appendix 3: Recruitment Emails for Online Interviews with Cyber-harassed Victims (Study 2)

To: [Insert participant's email address]

Subject: Interview Invitation

Hi [Insert participant's name if available],

You recently completed an online survey about your negative online experiences, and indicated that you might be interested in taking part in an online interview.

I would like to hear more about your experiences. If you are interested in telling me more about your experiences, please email me back and I can let you know more about the interview process. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me and I will do my best to answer any of your questions.

Many thanks for your help.

Catherine O'Neill

Upon receipt of an email from the participant, the following email will be sent:

Hi [Insert participant's name],

Thanks for your reply.

The survey you completed provided 18 online behaviours and asked if you thought the behaviours were criminal, whether you experienced them, and who you would tell if you experienced them. My interest for the interview is the behaviours you experienced. The interviews can be done via Instant Messenger or email and are very informal. If you want to do the interview via Instant Messenger, let me know what software you prefer to use and then we would arrange a time to chat online about your experiences. If you choose to do it via email, we would exchange a series of emails.

Before the interview, you will be asked to provide your consent to take part. This can be done online and I'll send you an email the day before the interview starts. If, and when, you provide your consent, we can arrange when suits you to take part in the interview. To be honest, there aren't that many questions because I want the interview to be quite informal. So, I'll mostly be asking you questions about your responses. When the interview is finished and I'm analysing the data, I might need to email you again to make sure I'm interpreting the things you have said in a way that you agree with. I'll keep this to a minimum though☺. If you still want to take part, the interviews will be beginning from next week. Please let me know if you are interested.

Hope to hear from you soon, and I apologise for the lengthy email.
Catherine

Appendix 4: Experiences of Negative Online Behaviours: Background Information and Informed Consent (Study 2)

Background and Information

Upon completing an online survey, you expressed an interest in participating in an online interview, and are now invited to take part in an online interview about your experiences of negative online behaviours.

Aims

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of your experiences and/or perceptions of cyber-harassing behaviours. If you have experienced cyber-harassing behaviours, the interviews will assess the impact of these experiences on your life. In addition, you will be asked about social and/or professional support networks that you may have sought to help you deal with your experiences. If you have not experienced cyber-harassment, you will be asked about your perceptions of cyber-harassing behaviours. You will also be asked about your attitudes towards individuals who have been cyber-harassed and how, and if, you think cyber-harassment should be dealt with.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an online interview. The interview will take place at a time to suit you and using an Instant Messaging service of your choosing. The interview will last approximately 1 ½ hours.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The data you provide will be kept securely in password protected files. Should excerpts of your interview need to be printed, they will be stripped of all identifying information and kept securely in locked filing cabinets. Should the data need to be transported, it will be held on a password protected USB key and kept by the principal researcher. All of the information you provide will be strictly confidential and the researcher and her three supervisors will be the only people with access to the data held. The data will be held until the end of the PhD project, after which it will be destroyed. You do not have to provide any information that could be used to identify you. To ensure your anonymity, you can use an anonymous email address if you choose to do so. As the interviews are conducted solely online, you do not have any face-to-face contact with the interviewer. All of the information you provide will be strictly confidential. Individuals will not be identified in any publication of the results. The results of the study will be published in the PhD thesis, in conference presentations and journal articles. However, all identifying information will be changed prior to any of the results being published.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary and it would be appreciated if you try to answer all of the questions. If you feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions or cannot answer some of the questions, any answers you provide will be useful. If you do not want to answer any particular questions, you can use a codeword to pass on any question. You can choose the word at the beginning of the interview. You can withdraw from the study at any time. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym before the interviews and this can be used to withdraw from the study at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

Whilst there are no direct incentives for taking part in this study, it is hoped that you will find participating an interesting and rewarding experience. You will be asked to report on whether you have experienced some potentially upsetting behaviour. Whilst it is anticipated that you will not experience any distress from taking part in the interview, if you feel affected, please call Nottingham Trent University Student Counselling services: City Campus 0115 848 6487, Clifton Campus 0115 848 6623, Brackenhurst Campus 0115 848 6623 (www.ntu.ac.uk/ssc/counselling_service/). The university's counselling service will be notified of this study prior to the interviews taking place. They will not be given any individual's information will be told that the study has provided you with their contact information.

Contact Details

If you have any questions about the research, you can email Catherine O'Neill *[insert email address]*. Alternatively, you can email Catherine's supervisor, Dr. Monica Whitty *[insert email address]*.

Thank you for your participation.

Declaration of Informed Consent

If you have read the background and information about the study and would like to proceed, please complete the following. If you do not wish to proceed, please close the browser.

I confirm that the purpose of the study has been explained to me prior to completing the survey, that I have been given information about it in writing, and that the researcher's contact details have been provided to me should I have any questions about the research.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I have taken part in the research of my own free will.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

I give my permission for the data I provide to be held securely by the researcher, on the understanding that the data will be destroyed at the end of the project.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

I agree that the data can be stored and used for scientific research and in presentations in scientific journals and conferences, but not for any other purpose and any publication or presentation that uses the material will edit out any personal information that might allow me to be identified.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any stage prior to the data being analysed.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Your Information

Please provide the email address you are using to communicate with Catherine O'Neill for the interview. This address will allow for Catherine to ensure you have provided your consent prior to the interview.

Please enter a pseudonym for the interview. The name you choose will be used to identify your data when it is being analysed. If you do not choose a pseudonym one will be chosen for you.

Thank You

Thank you for providing your consent for the interview.

Catherine will contact you via email to confirm when your interview will take place.

Appendix 5: Experiences of Negative Online Behaviours: Interview Schedule (Study 2)

Hi, I'm Catherine and I'd like to thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview.

Have you read the background information to the study and completed the consent form?

Could you tell me the pseudonym you chose when you gave your consent to take part in this interview?

During the interview I would appreciate it if you could answer as many questions as possible. If you feel uncomfortable and don't want to answer any particular question you can pass. Just let me know if this is the case. Is that OK?

Because I can't see you during the interview, please tell me if you feel upset. I want to make sure you are feeling OK during the interview. Is that OK?

I'd like to remind you that you have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage prior to data analysis. You can do this by emailing me with your pseudonym and asking me to withdraw your data. Is that OK?

Before we start, are there any questions you want to ask?

When you completed the survey, you said you had experienced [insert behaviour(s) experienced]. Could you describe this experience to me?

Prompts: Who perpetrated it? Duration of contact? How did it start? Has it ended and how did it end? Thoughts about or impressions of the perpetrator? Does participant think the perpetrator did it to anyone else?

How did the incident(s) make you feel?

Prompts: At the time? Did the participant think about it for any period of time afterwards?

Why do you think it happened to you?

Prompts: Because of participant's use of the Internet? Some characteristic or behaviour attributed to the perpetrator?

What impact did it have on you?

Prompts: Permanent/temporary changes of Internet use? Any impact on social/work life? Psychological or physical impact? Why did it impact on him/her this way? If it happened offline, would the participant have felt differently and why?

Did you tell anyone about what happened?

Prompts: Who? Why did the participant choose to tell or not to tell someone? Was their advice useful? How did their reactions make the participant feel?

Instant Messenger/email is a novel approach to conducting an interview. How did you find the experience?

That's all the questions I have for you. I really appreciate you sharing your experience with me. Thank you again, and if you have any questions, feel free to email me.

Appendix 6: Recruitment Emails for Perceptions of Cyber-Harassment Interviews

To: [Insert email address]

Subject: What do you think of cyber-harassment?

Hi,

I'm a PhD student currently researching perceptions of cyber-harassment. I would be very grateful if you could spare some time to take part in an online interview. The interview will be conducted via Instant Messenger at a time to suit you. If you are interested in taking part, please use the link provided to give your consent. You will also be asked to provide a contact email address so I can contact you to arrange a time for the interview. Anyone who has taken part in the interviews have enjoyed the experience, and I hope you will too.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=5wbZPvKauXgzT_2fNqKTVXsg_3d_3d

Should you have any questions about the research, or if there are any problems with the link, please let me know.

Thanks

Catherine O'Neill

Appendix 7: Perceptions of Cyber-Harassment Interviews: Background Information, and Declaration of Informed Consent (Study 3)

Background and Information

Please take some time to read through the information about the study, and feel free to contact me [*insert email address*] should you require any further information.

Aims

This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of your perceptions of cyber-harassment. You will also be asked about your attitudes towards individuals who have been cyber-harassed, and how you think cyber-harassment should be dealt with.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an online interview. The interview will take place at a time to suit you and using an Instant Messaging service of your choosing. The interview will last approximately 1 ½ hrs.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The data you provide will be kept securely in password protected files. Should excerpts of the interviews need to be printed, they will be stripped of all identifying information and kept securely locked in filing cabinets. Should the data need to be transported, it will be held on a password protected USB key. All of the data will be strictly confidential. The researcher and her three supervisors will be the only people with access to the data. The data will be held until the end of the PhD project, after which it will be destroyed. You do not have to provide any information that could identify you. To ensure your anonymity, you can use an anonymous email address. As the interviews are conducted online, you do not have any face-to-face contact with the interviewer. All of the information you provide will be strictly confidential. Individuals will not be identified in any publication or presentation of the results. The results will be published in the PhD thesis, in conference presentations and journal articles. All identifying information will be changed prior to any of the results being published.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary and if you feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions, or cannot answer some of the questions, any answers you provide will be helpful. You can withdraw from the study at any time. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym before the interviews, which can be used to withdraw from the study at any time prior to data analysis.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

Whilst there are no direct incentives for taking part in this study, it is hoped that you will find participating an interesting and rewarding experience. Whilst it is anticipated that you will not experience any distress from taking part in the interviews, if you feel affected, please contact The Samaritans by phone 08457 90 90 90 or by email www.samaritians.org.

Contact Details

If you have any questions about the research, you can email Catherine O'Neill *[insert email address]*. Alternatively, you can email Catherine's supervisor, Dr. Monica Whitty *[insert email address]*.

Thank you for your participation.

Declaration of Informed Consent

If you have read the background and information about the study and would like to proceed, please complete the following. If you do not wish to proceed, please close the browser.

I confirm that the purpose of the study has been explained to me prior to completing the survey, that I have been given information about it in writing, and that the researcher's contact details have been provided to me should I have any questions about the research.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I have taken part in the research of my own free will.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

I give my permission for the data I provide to be held securely by the researcher, on the understanding that the data will be destroyed at the end of the project.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

I agree that the data can be stored and used for scientific research and in presentations in scientific journals and conferences, but not for any other purpose and any publication or presentation that uses the material will edit out any personal information that might allow me to be identified.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any stage prior to the data being analysed.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Appendix 8: Perceptions of Cyber-Harassment: Interview Schedule (Study 3)

1. Can you think of any examples of cyber-harassment?
2. What kinds of behaviours do you think constitutes cyber-harassment? Why?
 Prompts: malicious software that can be used to damage someone's computer hardware/software, or to access information held on their computer.
 Sending someone abusive/threatening/sexually explicit messages via the Internet or to their mobile phone
 Telling someone in an online chat information about their offline life that they did not disclose, or that they followed them offline.
3. Why do you think people are harassed on the Internet?
4. Do you think cyber-harassment can have a real impact on people's lives? Why or why not?
 Prompt: Online, offline
5. What would you think if a friend told you they felt depressed or socially isolated because someone harassed them on the internet?
6. What would you think if a friend told you they were afraid to leave their house because someone harassed them on the internet?
7. What advice would you give to such a friend?
8. Can you think of any laws that cyber-harassment violates? Why or why not?
9. What do you think needs to happen for cyber-harassment to be criminal?
10. If you were allowed to create a law to prosecute cyber-harassment, what would the law include?
11. Do you think cyber-harassment should be reported to the police? Why or why not?
12. Why do you think people do/do not report cyber-harassment to the police?
13. Why do you think the police should/should not get involved with cyber-harassment cases?
14. What do you think the police can do?
15. What do you think the police cannot do?
16. What do you think can be done to protect Internet users from cyber-harassment?
 Prompt: By Internet users, the government, ISPs etc.
17. Thanks for taking part in the interview. Online interviews are different from face-to-face interviews. How did you feel about doing the interview online?
 Prompt: more or less positive than FtF?

Appendix 9: Interviews with Police Officers: Recruitment Letter (Study 4)

5th January 2009.

To whom it may concern,

I am a PhD student at Nottingham Trent University, currently researching victim and non-victim perceptions of cyber-harassment. The last phase of my research involves interviewing police officers about their role in dealing with cases involving cyber-harassment. To avoid issues of data protection, the interviews do not require officers' to provide specific details of such cases. Rather, the research focuses on discussing the issue of cyber-harassment, police officers' roles, and identifying ways to raise public awareness.

As my research focuses on the perceived criminality of cyber-harassing behaviours, cyber-harassment has been defined in accordance with the Protection from Harassment Act (1997). The Act stipulates that harassment involves a course of conduct (on at least two occasions) that causes the victim alarm or distress. In line with this, cyber-harassment involves a course of conduct that utilises the Internet or mobile phone technology.

Unfortunately, I have had some difficulty in accessing police officers who would be interested in taking part in my research. I would be very grateful if you could help me with this by passing my contact details to any officers who would be interested. The interviews will be conducted at a time and place to suit volunteers and will take no longer than 1 hour. Alternatively, the interviews can be conducted via the telephone. In return, I will gladly send a report of my findings to your department. Should you be interested in this research, you can contact me via email at *[insert email address]* or by phone *[insert contact number]*.

I greatly appreciate your time and any help you can provide.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine O'Neill

Appendix 10: Police Officers: Background and Information Sheet (Study 4)



Perceptions of Cyber-Harassment Background and Information Sheet

Catherine O'Neill (PhD Student)

Nottingham Trent University

Thank you for the interest you have shown in taking part in this research project. Before you agree to participate, please read through the following information which explains the project in detail. If you have any questions about the project, or the nature of your participation, feel free to get in touch with either myself or my director of studies (contact details can be found at the end of this document).

Aims

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of your experiences with and/or perceptions of victims of cyber-harassment. You will be asked about your role as a police officer in assisting victims of cyber-harassment. This will include any training/guidelines you would follow should a victim approach you for help. The aim is not to reflect negatively on your profession, but to learn of your views of cyber-harassment.

Procedures

Interviews will last for 1 hour and will be held at a time and place to suit you. Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed following the interview.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The data you provide will be kept securely in password protected files, and will be stripped of all identifying information. Should the data need to be transported, it will be held on a password protected USB key and held by myself. The information you provide will be strictly confidential and the researcher and her three supervisors will be the only people with access to the data held. The data will be held until the end of the PhD project, after which it will be destroyed. The results of the study will be published in the PhD thesis, in

conference presentations and journal articles. However, any identifying information will be changed prior to any of the results being published.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary and if you feel uncomfortable answering or cannot answer some of the questions or, any answers you provide will be helpful. You can withdraw from the study at any time by contacting me. Should you withdraw; any data you have supplied will be destroyed. If you have been notified about this study by a superior officer, your participation will be treated confidentially and will not be reported back to your superior officer.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

Whilst there are no direct benefits in taking part, it is hoped that you find the experience enjoyable. When the data has been analysed, a report will be submitted to the police constabulary. The submission of the report does not eliminate your right to withdraw from the study, and does not mean force you into taking part.

Contact Details

If you have any questions about the research, you can email Catherine O'Neill *[insert email address]*. Alternatively, you can email Catherine's supervisor, Prof. Mark Griffiths *[insert email address]*.

Thank you for your participation.

**Appendix 11: Interviews with Police Officers: Declaration of Informed Consent
(Study 4)**



**Perceptions of Cyber-Harassment
Declaration of Informed Consent**

*Catherine O'Neill (Principal Researcher)
Nottingham Trent University*

	Yes	No
	<i>(Please tick)</i>	
I confirm that the purpose of the study has been explained to me prior to taking part in the interview, that I have been given information about it in writing, and that the researcher's contact details have been provided to me should I have any questions about the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I have taken part in the research of my own free will.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give my permission for the data I provide to be held securely by the researcher, on the understanding that the data will be destroyed at the end of the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that the data can be stored and used for scientific research and in presentations in scientific journals and conferences, but not for any other purpose and any publication or presentation that uses the material will edit out any personal information that might allow me to be identified.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any stage by contacting the researcher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give my permission to the interview being digitally recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give my permission for the researcher to identify the police force in any publication of results, and I understand that individual police officers and/or branches will not be identified.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signed: _____ Date _____

Researcher: _____ Date _____

Appendix 12: Interviews with Police Officers: Demographic Information Sheet
(Study 4)

Demographic Information Sheet

Please give your age in years: _____

What gender are you? (please circle) Male Female

How many years have you been a police officer? _____

Appendix 13: Interviews with Police Officers: Interview Schedule (Study 4)

1. What do you think about cyber-harassment?
Prompts: professional views, personal views
2. What is your role as a police officer in dealing with cases involving cyber-harassment?
3. What guidelines do you follow if you were presented with a case involving cyber-harassment?
4. On a practical level, why do you think the guidelines are/are not useful?
5. Do you think cyber-harassed victims report their experiences to the police? Why or why not?
6. Why do you think cyber-harassment can/cannot be successfully prosecuted?
7. What do you think can be done to encourage victims to report their experiences to the police?